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THE AFRICAN CRUISER



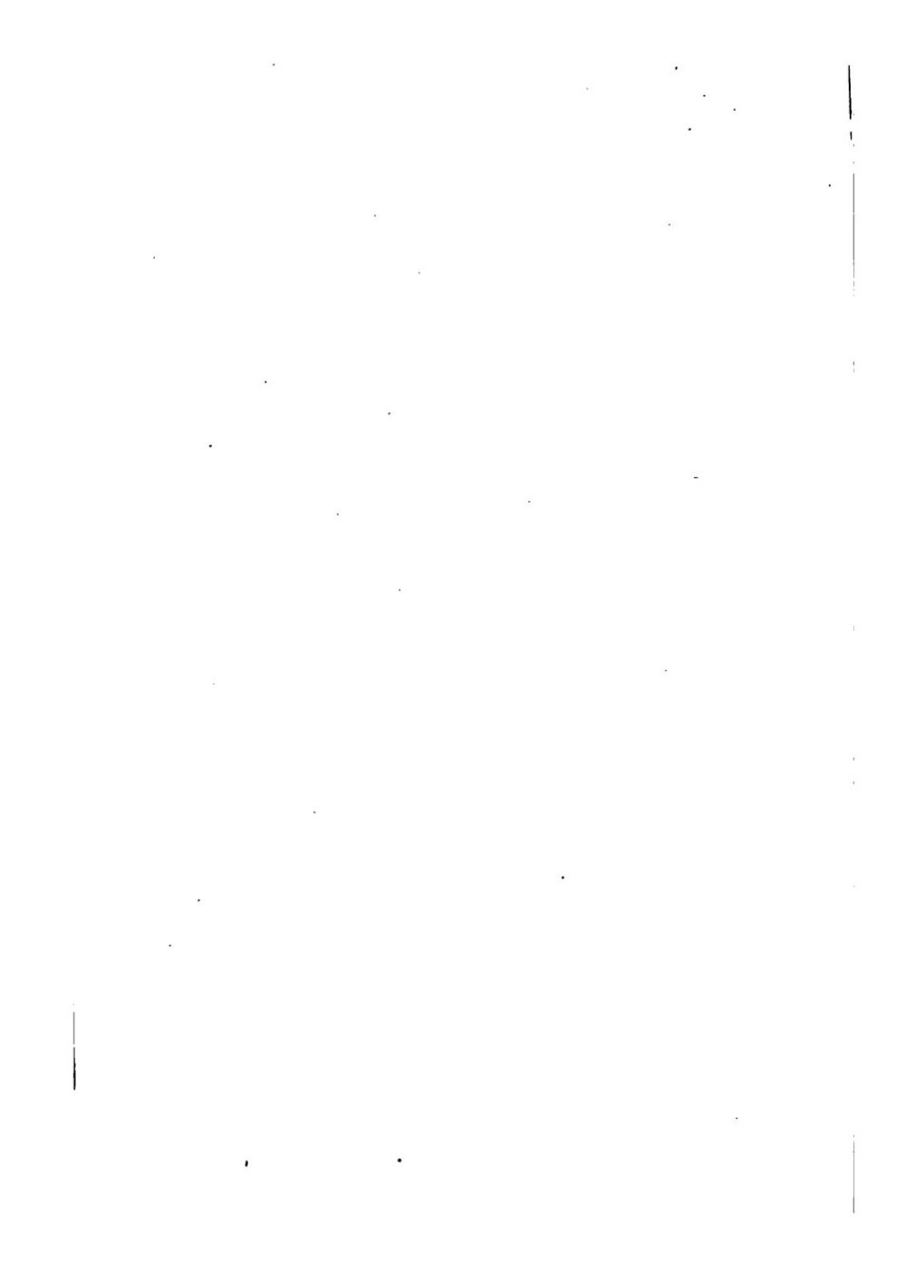
ADVENTURES ON THE
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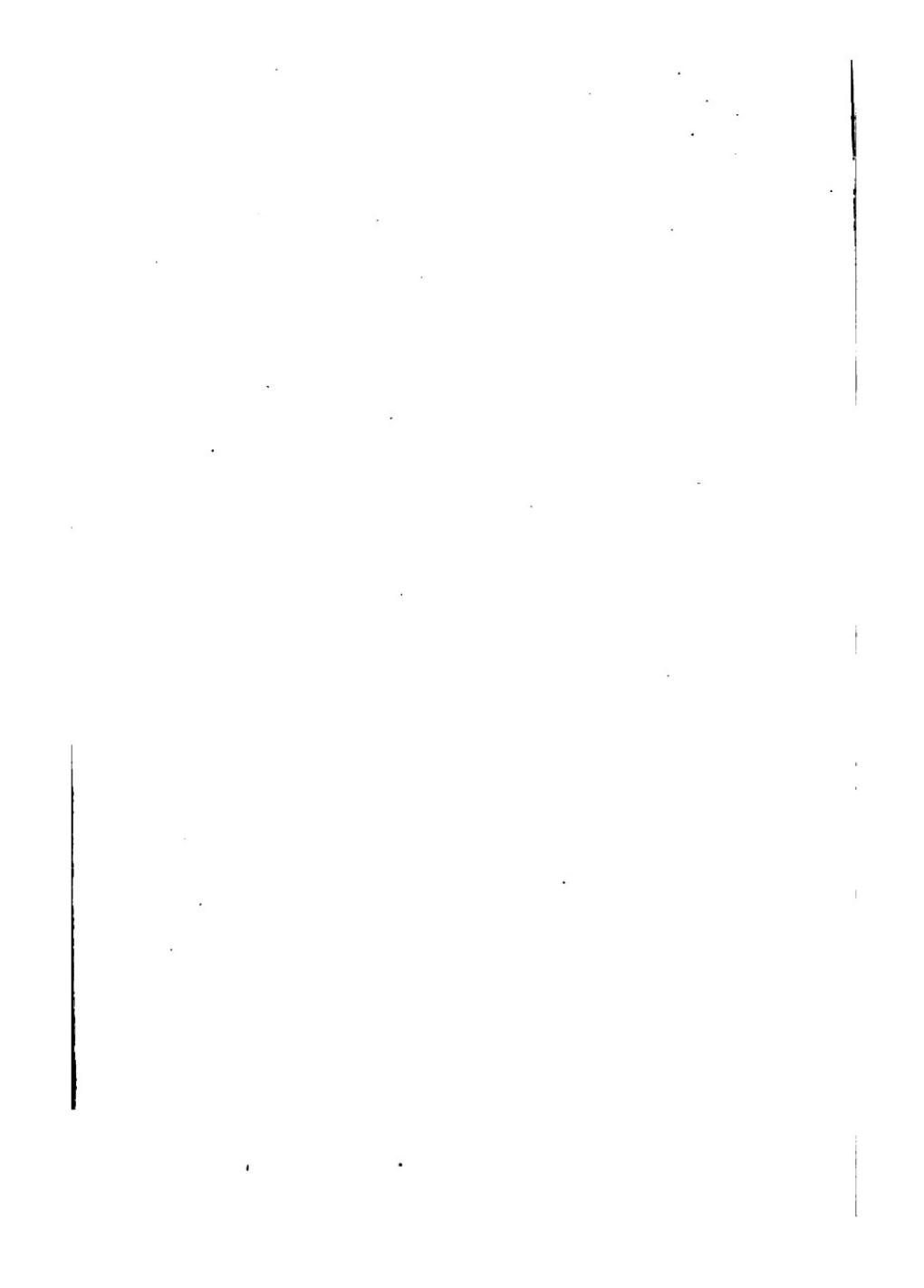
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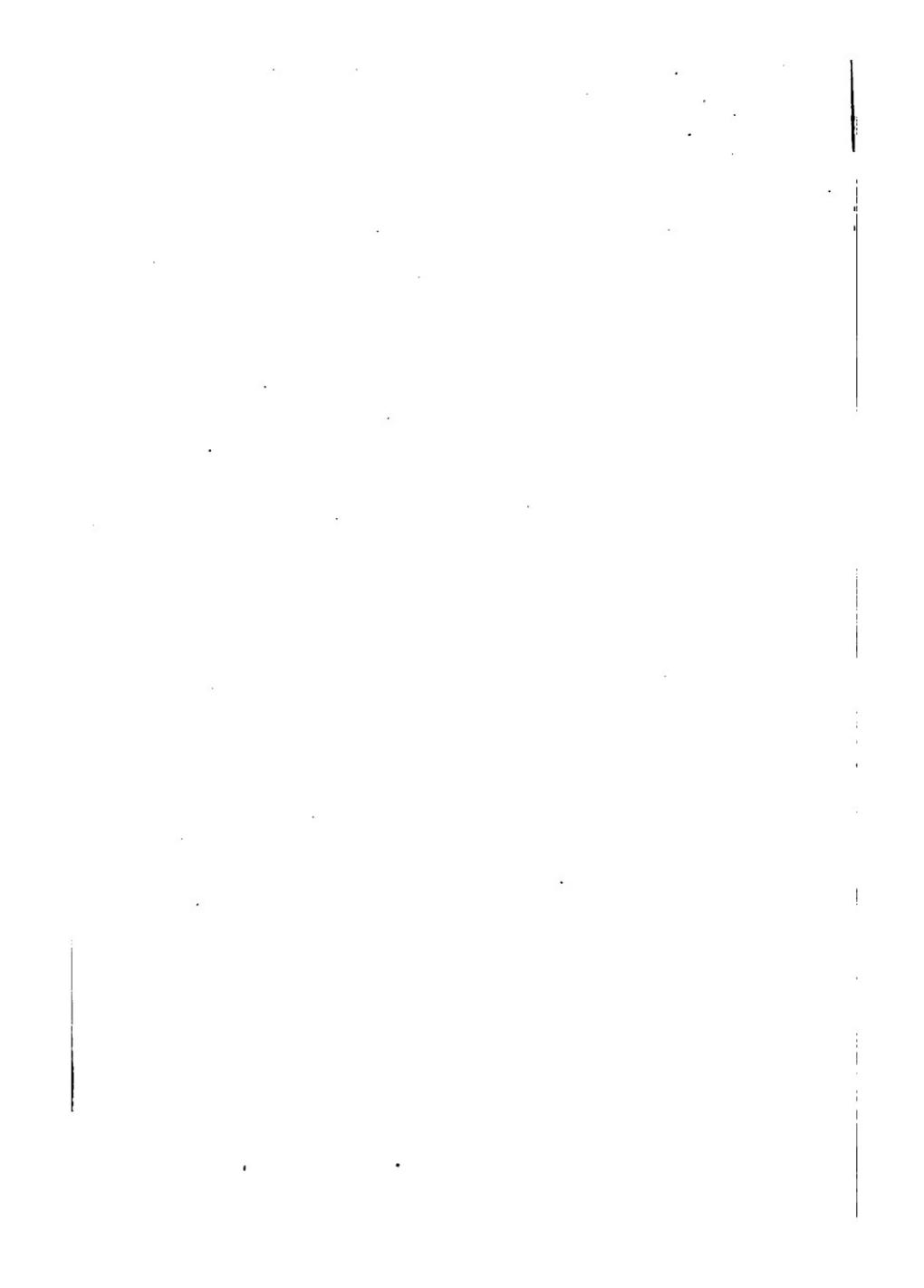
















'CLOSER AND CLOSER STILL WE CAME.'

AFRICAN CIVILISATION

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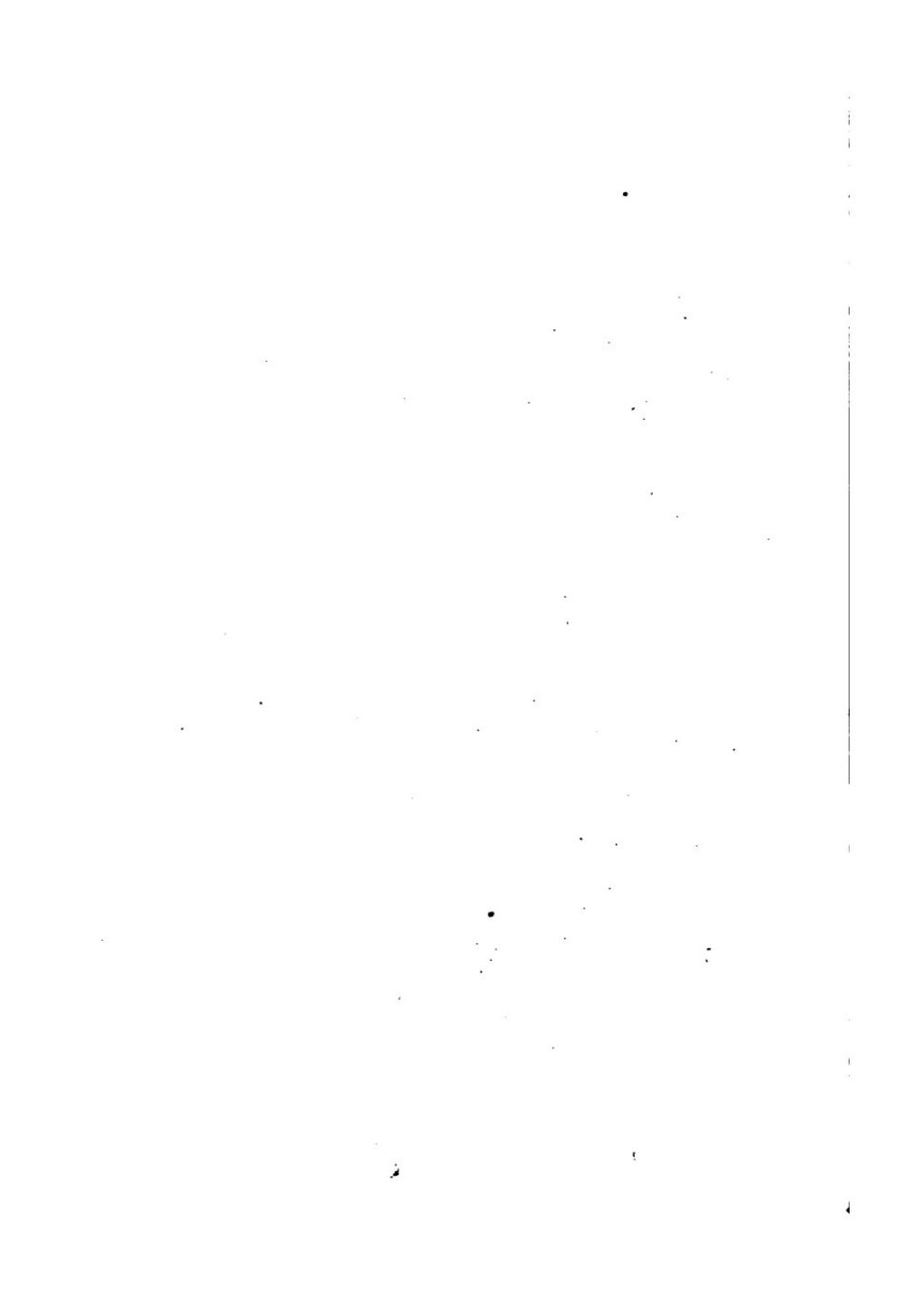
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THE BOSTONIAN

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10. The following table shows the number of hours worked by each employee.



THE
AFRICAN CRUISER.

*A MIDSHIPMAN'S ADVENTURES ON
THE WEST COAST.*

BY
S. WHITCHURCH SADLER, R.N.
AUTHOR OF 'MARSHALL VAVASOUR.'



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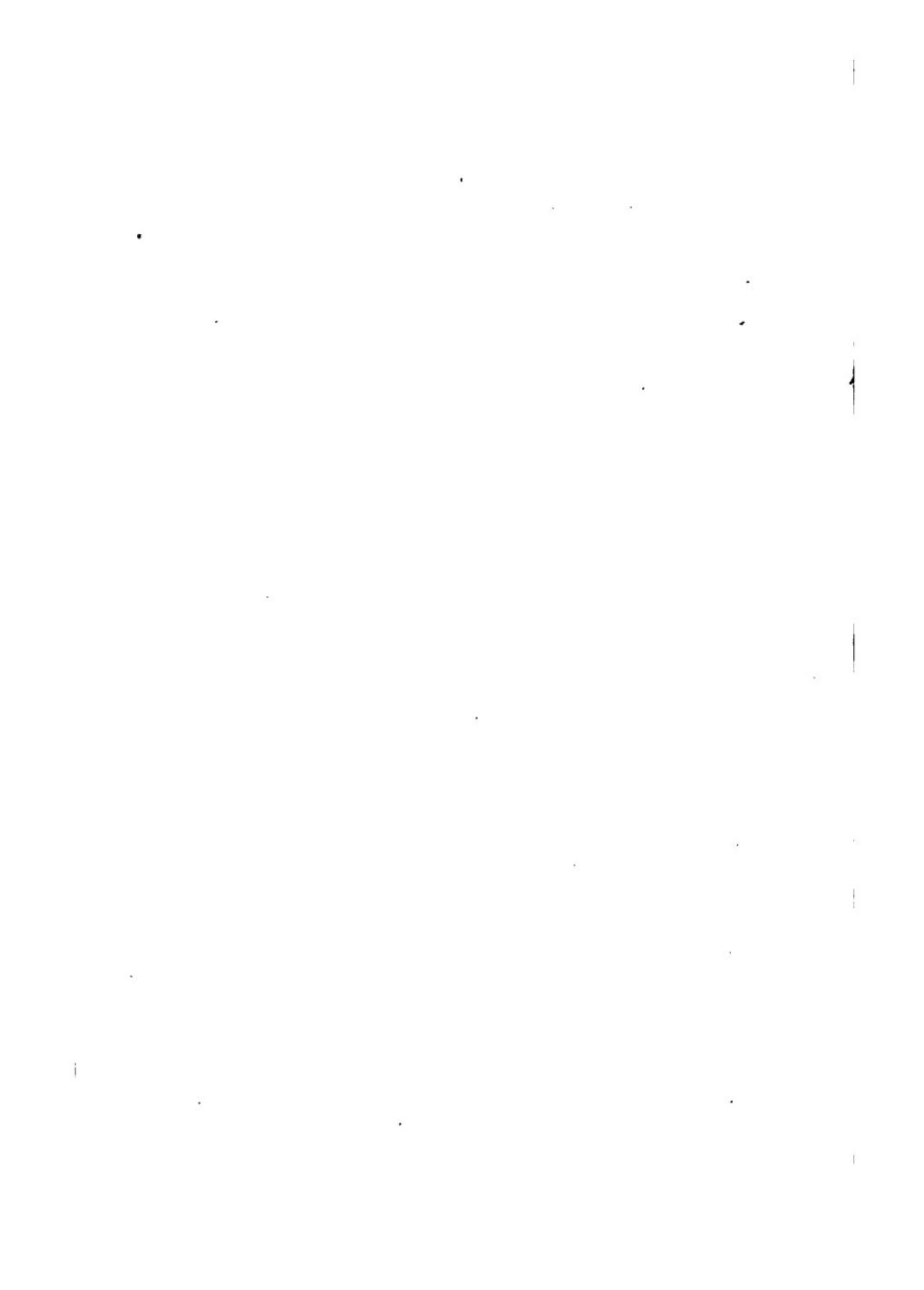
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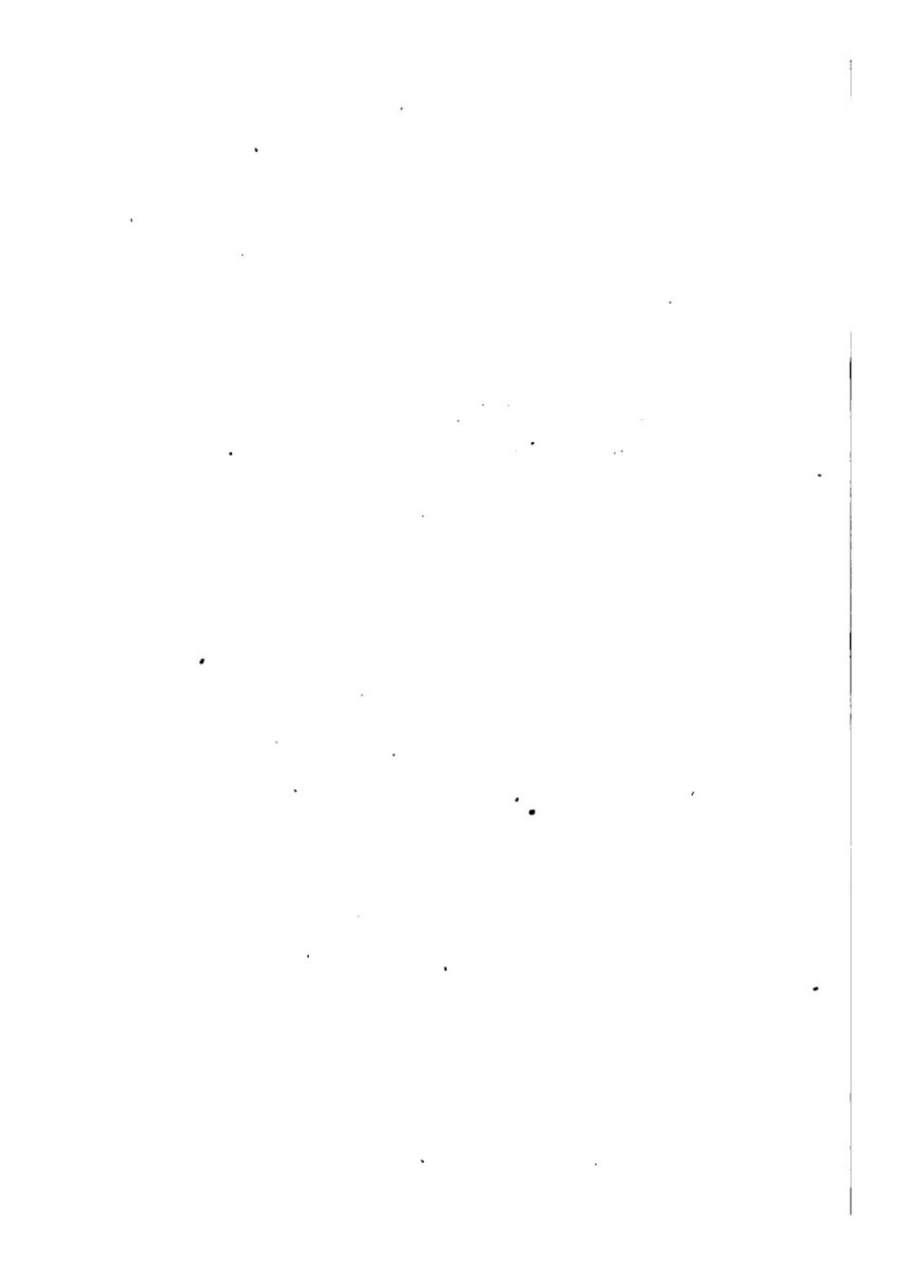
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ref

THE

AFRICAN CRUISER.

CHAPTER I.

I SAIL FOR SIERRA LEONE.

I WAS a very small midshipman in those days, and I belonged to a very small ship ; in fact, correctly speaking, H.M.S. *Planet* was not a ship at all, only a ten-gun brig, and the guns mere pop-guns when compared with the big three-hundred pounders carried now-a-days. But, notwithstanding, I was proud of my uniform, proud of my dirk, and ready in a few months to enter the lists against any one venturing to say that the *Planet* was not the smartest cruiser in the West Coast of Africa squadron.

When the news first came on board at Portsmouth, that our destination was 'the Coast,' many faces grew a shade more pale at the thought of three years on that sickly station. My mother, who had come down to see the last of us, wept bitterly as I told her of our sailing orders. She possessed sufficient interest at the Admiralty even then to have effected my exchange into another ship, but she was a soldier's wife, and had a strong sense of duty, so when the vessel sailed, I sailed in her.

There were six of us in the midshipmen's berth, myself and another youngster being the only members of the mess who had not been to sea before. A pleasant, snug place was the 'berth'—better than my readings of 'Midshipman Easy' and 'Peter Simple' had led me to expect. An old mate called Forrester took me under his especial charge, allowed no one to bully me but himself, and although he frightened me with stories of yellow fever, predicting that few of us would live to see

Portsmouth again, yet, in his care for my health, he never scrupled at injuring his own, by drinking my daily allowance of grog. I did not thank him for it then—I do now.

The anchor was hove up cheerily to the music of our band, consisting of one violin and the drummer boy's fife; and with a pleasant breeze the Isle of Wight was soon left behind. That night I turned in to my hammock, happy beyond measure that the dream of my young life was at length accomplished—that I was really at sea.

The marine sentry's lantern hung from the deck close to my head, swinging to and fro with the ship's motion, and I watched it until sleep closed my eyes. In my dreams its glimmer still haunted me, but now I fancied it was hanging at the end of the main top-gallant yard, and the captain was shouting to me to 'lay out' along the yard, and bring the lantern in.

Obeying the order, I seemed to creep cautiously along the slippery yard inch by inch, until within

arm's length of the lamp. Reaching forth my hand I grasped it, but to my horror a tremendous lurch at this moment threw me off the yard. In falling, I caught with the other hand at the yard-arm, but could not hold on. I let go, and fell down, down, until with a horrible plunge the waters closed over me. I cried out for help.

'Hullo, youngster, you're in a pretty mess!'

It was Forrester's voice. I opened my eyes, and found myself lying on the deck with a bleeding forehead, water rushing all about, and the broken lantern in my hand. I had seized it, as a heavy lurch of the ship threw me out of the hammock, a sea at the same time having tumbled down the main hatchway and deluged the lower deck.

A gale had sprung up, which to me seemed a hurricane. On the lower deck, midshipmen's chests, shot, crockery, and all sorts of gear which had not yet been properly secured, rushed backwards and forwards with the ship's roll in dire confusion. The carpenters were covering and batten-

ing down the hatchways to keep out the seas which the *Planet* was taking clean in over the bows. Very sick and very miserable, I managed to creep into a corner of the berth, where I coiled myself up on the lockers, and tried to sleep. Forrester then returned to his watch on deck.

Breakfast the next morning could I eat none, but I went on deck and found the sea and wind both going down. Refreshed with the sea-breeze, I was even able, on the steward touching his cap with, 'the captain's compliments, and requests the pleasure of your company at dinner to-day,' to reply 'with pleasure.' Forrester, I found, had also been invited, and he told me it was worth dining in the cabin, if only to hear the captain's amusing yarns, as he was a capital representative of the old school; one, as he said himself, whose head had become bald through so many youngsters stepping over him.

The dinner hour was half-past three, and the roll of the drum answered the purpose of first dressing-

bell. But how to dress was the rub! This was how it was managed: premising that midshipmen's chests in a brig are placed in what is called the steerage—that is, on the lower deck—close to the marines' messes at the foot of the main hatchway, down which a free current of air rushes, refreshing enough, doubtless, but rather unpleasant while you are performing the duties of the toilet. Well, my marine servant first gently dislodged a messmate of his who was reposing peacefully on my chest, with his head on a coil of rope, then, lifting the lid, and fastening it up, he poured about half-a-pint of tarry water into the pewter basin which is fixed in the washing tray, and left me to my ablutions. These were quickly performed, the more so that I saw the drummer close by giving premonitory taps in readiness for the 'Roast Beef of Old England,' when the steward should give the signal.

The first lieutenant, surgeon, and marine officer dined in the cabin as well as ourselves. Captain Dentloup received us with all courtesy; and of

course, as a youngster, I had the grace to remain silent and listen to the conversation of my superior officers. While the cloth was being removed, the captain, pushing an empty bottle out of the way, called out,—

‘Steward! Here, take away this marine.’

Whereupon the marine officer, suddenly becoming red in the face, inquired—

‘May I be permitted to ask, Captain Dentloup, your reason for calling that empty bottle a marine?’

‘Most certainly; I gave it that name because, like all of your gallant corps, it has done its duty, and is ready to do it again.’

We all laughed at the capital way in which the slip of the tongue had been changed into a compliment, and the threatened peace being restored, the captain continued :—

‘Did I ever tell you, gentlemen, how I got my commission as lieutenant? We were lying at Spithead in the old *Bellerophon*; the queen was coming

on board to have a look at the ship, and the two senior midshipmen were ordered to do duty as side-boys. So Daubeney—he's been a post-captain and C.B. for years now, and I'm only a commander—Daubeney and I took our stations over the side at the foot of the accommodation ladder. The Royal barge swept up alongside, I gracefully removed my cap, and handed the crimson side-rope to Her Majesty. Just at that moment, what with my cap, my sword, the side-rope, and nervousness, I couldn't keep a steady footing—souse!—over-board I went. Well, the ducking, of course, was nothing to me, I swam to the nearest lower-deck port, and was quickly hauled in. Then down came the quarter-master with an order for me to go on deck immediately. Up I went, and our captain, who looked rather angry, took me aft to Her Majesty, who, bless her kind face! said, laughing as she looked at my dripping figure, which was making a great pool on the deck, "You shall not be a loser, Mr Dentloup, for your sufferings in my

service, although you deserve to be for the fright you gave me." Sure enough the First Lord must have had an order to make a note of it, for I was promoted the very day I passed my examination.'

Soon after this yarn, I saw the first lieutenant look at the doctor in the same way in which I had noticed my mother, after dinner at home, look at some lady at the other end of the table. Then we all got up, made our bows, and went out of the cabin.

We sailed on, southward ever, until we neared Sierra Leone, and after some days of calms, light winds, and intense heat, at last anchored abreast the town. Sierra Leone, a place which, deadly as beautiful, has earned for itself the name of 'The White Man's Grave,' seemed to me the loveliest spot eyes could behold. The settlement stood out so picturesque, with its houses gleaming white amid gardens and trees, its irregular streets on the banks of a large inlet of water, and scattered villas climbing the hills above. And then to us,

just arrived from England, how strange and delicious the foliage—the cocoa-nut palms and the groups of natives with scanty garments of gaily-coloured calico !

When all the work was done that evening, sails furled, yards squared, and the men at supper, enjoying their pipes, and chatting with the nice, clean-looking black women who came alongside in canoes with bananas, oranges, alligator pears, pine-apples, &c., Forrester called out, seeing me gazing at the low belt of verdure on the northern side of the inlet—

‘Jump into the jolly-boat, Murray, and I will show you what queer fishes grow on trees in these latitudes.’

Taking a couple of boys with us in the boat, we pulled away, and soon crossed the water. But, as we neared the green belt, which looked so pleasant at a distance, we found nothing but a tangled mass of mangrove bushes upspringing from a bottomless sea of black, fetid mud. There, for miles, as far as

the eye could reach, extended this dreary swamp, ever spreading fever and death around the country. As we looked more closely into its depths, we turned away, sickened with the miasma, and cared little for gathering the oysters which, as Forrester showed me, were growing on the mangrove stems.

We only stopped three days at Sierra Leone, and the evening we sailed there were whispers in the mess that 'Yellow Jack' had come on board. When I turned in, I saw Gilbert, the assistant-surgeon, busy among the marines' hammocks, and to my usual prayers I added one for our safety from pestilence. It was my middle watch, but when the quarter-master came down, and, after shaking the clews and poking his lantern in my eyes, called out, 'Eight-bells, sir!' I could not turn out; fever had me in its clutches—tangible ones almost they seemed, as if my back were closely gripped by a red-hot hand—and then the horrible headache and sickness! The kind-hearted surgeon came to my side at once, and did all he could, but the next ten

days were almost a blank, three of them entirely so, while delirium possessed every faculty.

On the first day of real convalescence, when I was feeling utterly weak but very grateful, the lower deck seemed deserted, and I heard the ship's bell tolling. 'Can it be Sunday?' I thought. 'Yes; for that's the captain's voice reading prayers.' After a time the voice paused—two heavy, sullen plunges in quick succession smote the ear; and then, in a louder key, the words came—'We therefore commit their bodies to the deep, to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body when the sea shall give up her dead.' I knew then too well—that, although death had spared me, some of our shipmates had been called away.

Forrester now came to cheer me up with prospects of prizes. We were now, he said, close to our cruising-ground, in the Bights of Benin, and I must make haste and get strong enough to board the first slaver we overhauled.

I soon got well after this, notwithstanding the

heat, which seemed to increase in intensity daily. This hot weather, too, brought us strange and unpleasant bed-fellows, for the *Planet* proved to be full of cockroaches, which, having found a home in the ship during former cruises on the coast, were now recovered from the torpor caused by their winter in England, and crept and flew about by thousands. Be it remembered, these creatures were at least three times the size of the ordinary 'black beetle' of our London kitchens, that there was no place free from their loathly presence, nothing that they did not eat—from the sugar on your breakfast table to the soap on your washstand, or the leather of your boots—and it will be conceded that severe measures were necessary for their destruction.

The first lieutenant was equal to the emergency; straightway he ordered that the ship's boys (there were six) should muster on deck every morning, each with three dozen cockroaches. If the full number were not forthcoming, for each insect defi-

cient was administered a 'fanam' from the master-at-arms' cane. It must be confessed that this substitute was rarely needed ; the boys had little difficulty in completing their task, and even in providing against a rainy day. One morning, observing our mess boy stealthily hiding away something in a locker, I had the curiosity to look inside, and there discovered that he had actually been *bottling up* his cockroaches. I pulled out a couple of wine bottles crowded with them. This incident induced the officers to make diligent search in their cabins, and many secret stores of the same nature, plenty of eggs among them—nest-eggs we may call them—were brought to light and ruthlessly thrown overboard. Still, in spite of the hundreds daily massacred, these pests never seemed to diminish.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST SLAVER.

OUR orders were to cruise off Lagos, then a well-known point of embarkation for slaves. On our arrival, we watched with interest the low, sandy shore, so low that the palms with which it was fringed seemed, as we first caught sight of them, to grow out of the water. There was nothing to admire in the appearance of the native town as seen from the deck, but our hearts beat with compassion on observing the long buildings thatched with palm leaves, which were undoubtedly slave barracoons, and where, with our glasses, we could make out hundreds of poor creatures waiting to be shipped.

Need I say how full of excitement we all were on first reaching our cruising ground, and how, after

a month had passed, and each sail that we chased proved to be, on closing, a harmless palm-oil trader, our hopes died out, and we felt the daily monotony and the depressing climate telling upon both health and spirits.

A change came at last. One morning when the *Planet* was standing in under easy sail for Lagos, then about six miles off, and I, as midshipman of the watch, was paddling about with naked feet while the men were washing decks, the first lieutenant, who had been steadily gazing through his glass in the direction of the barracoons, waiting for the mist to rise, suddenly called out to the boatswain's mate, 'Hands, make sail!' and then to me, 'Murray, run down and tell the Captain there is a large brig at anchor taking in slaves.' But Captain Dentloup, hearing the order, was on deck before I could get down the after ladder, so I hurried aloft to my station in the foretop.

Topgallant-sails and royals were soon set, I sent the men down from aloft, but remained myself in

the top to watch the chase. Evidently the stranger had seen us at the same time we had made her out, for as I gazed, the large canoes which had surrounded her began to paddle rapidly towards the shore, the brig was covered suddenly with a cloud of canvas, and, slipping her cable, stood alongshore to the westward under the influence of a land-wind which scarcely rippled the smooth water.

This part of the African coast runs nearly due east and west, and the *Planet* consequently had hitherto been steering about north. But some ten miles to the westward the land jutted out a little, and as the slaver must necessarily come farther out from the shore to clear this point, our course was now laid exactly for it, in order to cut her off and prevent her from gaining the open sea, where her probably superior sailing qualities would leave us no chance.

With intense interest I watched the chase as both vessels glided along towards the wished-for (on our part) meeting spot off the point.

'If the breeze freshens we shall do it, sir,' said the captain of the top. But when half-an-hour's suspense had passed, it was too plain that the wind did not mean to freshen—nay, was even dying away. And with it died our hopes, as we saw our anticipated prize, with her lighter build and larger sails, gradually creeping away, while the *Planet* lay like a log upon the water.

'Surely we must be within range now,' thought I ; for our diagonal course had brought the ships very near each other. The same idea had, apparently, crossed Captain Dentloup's mind, for I saw him on the forecastle, talking to the gunner.

'Give her a blank gun first, Mr Andrews.'

A bow gun was fired ; but it might have been a popgun for all the notice the strange sail took.

'Now a shot,' said the captain.

The sharp report of the eighteen-pounder followed the order. My eyes pursued the shot as it first grazed the water, then ricochetted along the surface ; but, to our disappointment, it sunk harm-

less before arriving within fifty yards of its destination.

Suddenly a flash issued from the enemy's side, and at the same moment, with a whiz-crack ! I found myself covered with falling splinters of wood, and looking up saw the fore-topgallant mast cut right in two by the shot. Evidently the calibre of the slaver's guns, although she might carry fewer in number, was superior to ours.

We were busy enough now in the top, clearing the wreck, for the fore-royal and topgallant sails were flapping about in dire confusion ; but we heard the captain give the order—

‘Man the starboard guns. Extreme elevation. Fire !’

All the shot fell short as before. Again the enemy fired. There was a groan, a fall, and our poor quartermaster lay stretched on the deck beside the wheel, dead. The shot had ploughed its way through his chest, and passed through the after port into the sea.

The remains of the good old sailor were carried below, while we, with intense but ineffectual anger, and mortification, watched the brig as, still keeping the land-wind which we had lost, she cleared the point, hoisting at the peak as she did so, in token of triumphant farewell, the gorgeous Spanish ensign.

'Pipe to breakfast, if you 'please,' was the next order. I came down from aloft, and descended to the midshipmen's berth, leaving Captain Dentloup and the first lieutenant walking the quarter-deck in earnest consultation.

'Don't be downhearted, Murray,' said Forrester, as I was sadly munching my biscuit. 'It will be all right. We shall have her yet, you'll see. I am much mistaken if she won't be soon becalmed, and then, if our commander is the man he used to be, we shall try a boarding match.'

Sure enough, Forrester was a true prophet. The breakfast half-hour had scarce expired when the pipe, 'Man and arm boats,' hurried us all on deck.

Officers and men saw with delight that the land-wind had deserted the brig, and that she was lying hopelessly becalmed some five miles off. In less than half-an-hour our boats were in the water, the men resting on their oars, waiting the signal for departure.

The expedition consisted of our large cutter, in charge of the first lieutenant, and two smaller and lighter boats—gigs—one commanded by Forrester and the other by the boatswain.

Forrester obtained permission for me to accompany him in the first gig; so, armed with a pistol and one of the ship's cutlasses—for I rather doubted the value of my little dirk, now an actual fight was in prospect—I seated myself by his side in the stern sheets.

Quietly and steadily the three boats rowed until within two hundred yards of the chace, as she lay motionless on the smooth water, sails brailed up, and no sign of life visible above the bulwarks of her low black hull. Suddenly three jets of flame flashed

from her side, and the water was ploughed up by a rushing storm of grape, canister, and langridge. This small shot happily fell short, but a round shot now came ricochetting along, and passed through the cutter's bows, killing one man and wounding two, whose oars dropped helplessly into the water.

'Give way, my lads!' shouted the first lieutenant. 'Three cheers, and board!' Gallantly the three boats pulled, regardless of the heavy fire now kept up by the slaver. We reached her first, striking her on the starboard quarter with such force, that Forrester, who was standing up cheering his men, lost his balance and fell into the stern sheets. A fortunate tumble for him, for at that moment a gun was fired which must have blown him to pieces; as it was, the charge passed over his head, half stunning all of us in the boat.

The slaver's men now clustered thick as bees on the bulwarks, firing muskets and pistols, and showering down cold shot and scalding water on our heads. But Forrester, regaining his feet, and calling on us



'A SPANIARD WAS TAKING DELIBERATE AIM WITH HIS MUSKET.'



to follow him, forced his way through all opposition, and jumped down, the first man on the slaver's deck. I then attempted to board, but my foot slipping on the ship's side (purposely greased), I fell backwards into the boat, upsetting a big marine who was following. The second time I managed better, the marine helping me by a hoist from behind, given with too hearty a good-will, for it landed me at full length, sprawling and helpless, on the deck.

Struggling with difficulty to my feet, I saw Forrester with his back to the mainmast, blood streaming down his face from a sabre cut, clearing a small circle round him with his sword, and keeping a knot of assailants at bay. A Spaniard close to me was taking deliberate aim with his musket, and on the point of pulling the trigger. I brought my cutlass down with all my little might on his head—just in time. The musket dropped from the ruffian's hand, exploding as it fell. The ball grazed Forrester's forehead, grooving the flesh. Thinking he was seriously or mortally wounded, he roused

himself to still more desperate efforts, and taking up the musket, prostrated two more of his antagonists with the butt-end. I sprang to his side; but at that moment a sudden shock brought me on my knees, and looking down, I saw the blood streaming from a bullet-wound in my leg.

By this time our boat's crew had forced their way on board and joined their officers, and the first lieutenant coming alongside in the cutter, and pouring his men on deck, the Spaniards, unused to the exchange of cutlass thrusts with British sailors, began to fall back, then threw down their arms, crying for quarter—and the prize was won.

The slaver's crew were ordered below, and the hatches secured over them. The gig was then sent away to the assistance of the second gig, which was floating some distance astern, the boatswain and all his boat's crew having been placed *hors de combat* by wounds and scalds in their attempts to board on the port-quarter.

Forrester was now able to attend to me, and

running to where I was resting against the main-mast, exclaimed, ‘Well, Murray, what will your mother say to this? You saved my life. But what’s this? My poor boy, you are badly wounded.’ He tore off his black silk neckerchief, and improvising a tourniquet, soon stopped the bleeding.

We had been too excited during the engagement to notice that a breeze was springing up, but looking now towards the *Planet*, we saw that she was rapidly closing. Feeling that our friends on board might be doubtful as to the result of the action, especially when noticing that one of the boats had been beaten off, the first lieutenant hoisted the English ensign over the Spanish, whereupon three ringing cheers for our success came across the water from our comrades. All in the slaver, who were able, answered that cheer, I among the rest, but my wound burst out again, and I fainted.

Captain Dentloup’s gratification at the capture of a prize bigger than the *Planet* herself was considerably tempered by the loss of three of his best men

killed and ten wounded. Yet when the hatchways of the *Dolorida*—such was the name of the slaver—were uncovered, and three hundred blacks found stowed away below like herrings, we all felt that these noble lives had not been vainly sacrificed.

The second lieutenant, who was sent on board with eleven men to take charge of the prize, was rather envied as he got under weigh the next morning, and sailed for Sierra Leone, the negroes singing and dancing for joy on the deck of the *Dolorida* as she parted company with the cruiser.

My wound—it was but a flesh one—soon healed. Months passed away, but to our surprise no news came from Sierra Leone of the arrival of the slaver. We cruised along the coast in search of intelligence, but no clue, not even a piece of wreck, could we discover. At last we were forced to believe that she had foundered in one of the tornadoes so common in those regions, and that Britons and Africans, rescuers and rescued, were whelmed in one common grave.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIGURE-HEAD OF THE 'LUCIFER.'

IT was my middle watch, and I paced up and down the lee-side of the *Planet's* quarter-deck—not much better than a fisherman's walk, 'two steps and overboard'—thinking now of home, now of our bad luck as a cruiser in not having made a prize since the unfortunate *Dolorida* was captured, six months ago. Seeing the officer of the watch safely out of the way, standing at the weather gangway peering out into the gloom, I stopped by the wheel to have a yarn with the quartermaster, a fine old sailor, who had got the rating of the poor fellow who was killed in the last action.

'Well, Moore,' said I, 'you'll never make your fortune with prize-money in this craft.'

'It does seem like it, sir,' he replied ; then mysteriously—'If it aint too great a liberty, do you mind telling me what the young woman as is our figure-head is called ?'

Now the work of art in question was an exceedingly well-carved representation of a beautiful maiden bearing upon her forehead a gilded star, so I replied—

'I really don't think she possesses any name, she is intended probably as a fairy, or something of that nature.'

'Not one of them wicked haythen goddesses, then, sir ?'

'No, certainly not. But what has that to do with our ill-luck ?'

'Well, I am glad of that, sir ; for it would be flying in the face of Providence to expect any good-fortune with a haythen leading us on, so to speak. Now don't ye laugh, Mr Murray, and I'll spin you a yarn of what happened on this same coast of Africa when I belonged to the *Lucifer*.'

So I seated myself on the after carronade-slide while Moore told his story.

'We were very sickly on board, and no wonder, sir, for our figure-head was an image of Lucifer himself. Lots of us were in our hammocks with yellow fever, two of our officers had died, and the captain was invalided home. We didn't get a new one for some time, but had what the purser's steward called "a hinterregnum," which, I suppose, is a long name for the first lieutenant when he takes charge of the ship. Well, the new captain came out at last. I liked his looks when he came on board. He was a first-rate sailor, and yet' he wouldn't allow no swearin' nor bad language, and the first Sunday after he joined he ordered church to be rigged, which hadn't ever been done in the *Lucifer* afore. There was a steward and a cook came on board with him, and, in course, they hadn't been in the ship three days before they were both down with fever.'

'But what,' said I, 'had this to do with the figure-head?'

'I am just a-coming to that, sir. You see we hadn't been watching our messmates die of Yellow Jack without talking it over on the lower-deck, and we thought we knew the reason, likewise why we hadn't made no prizes. So one day, in the dinner-hour, the petty-officers goes aft on the quarter-deck, all respectful and proper like, and axes to speak to the captain.

' "Well, my men," ses he, "what is it?"

' It had been settled atween us that Bill Simpson, the bosun's mate, was to speak ; but now when he ought to ha' begun, he looked uncomfortable-like, and trod on my toes as he tried to drop astern. But I gave him a shove from behind, and at last Bill speaks out—

' "Beg pardon, sir; but the ship's company wishes your honour would kindly cut off the figure-head."

' And then we all up and said we didn't like sailing behind such a creature nohow.

' The captain he didn't say much, but after we were gone we heard him send for the carpenter, and

that very evening when quarters were over, old Chips with two of his men got over the bows and sawed off first the curling tail and then the two horns of the figure.

'We almost gave a cheer when the horns and tail were brought on board and sent down to the cook for firewood. I did hear afterwards that the midshipmen, who were always up to some fun, made a bargain with the cook, and gave him some grog in exchange for the tail, which they stuck up as an ornament in the berth. But, anyhow, they took good care the captain shouldn't see it. The figure-head though didn't look quite right yet somehow, for you could see the place where the horns had been—although his crown was smooth as a priest's—and the stump of his tail was there. But the painter now set to work, and what with white paint and a bit of gold here, and a touch of blue there, the creature, which was almost as black as a nigger afore, was changed so as his mother wouldn't have known him.

'Well, sir, you may laugh at me, but it's true what I say ;—we didn't have no more yellow fever after that, and the very next week we took our first prize.'

I did *not* laugh at Moore's long yarn, but only inquired whether the captain of the *Lucifer* did nothing to stop the fever besides spoiling the figure-head ?

'Oh ! There was plenty of what the doctor called "insanity precautions" used. The bilge-water was pumped out, whitewashing always a-going on, and the ship kept sweet and clean ; but then they made her smell bad again with a lot of that "chloride of lime" stuff, so it stands to reason that couldn't have made no difference. But there's eight bells striking, sir, and I must go and call your relief.'

Moore, with this, went below, and I followed to call the first lieutenant, who always kept the morning watch. This officer had already been roused, and by an animal more mischievous even

than a midshipman. I found the sentry standing with his lantern at the cabin door, while the lieutenant with the marine's bayonet was violently prodding at the bed-clothes.

'Ah! Murray,' he said. 'Here's a horrible brute of a rat somewhere in the bed; he woke me up by biting my shoulder.'

We cautiously pulled off the bed-clothes, inch by inch, the sentry stooping over to light us.

Nothing here—yes, yes! there he is.'

A terrible lunge was made, but the bayonet missed its aim and stuck fast in the bulk-head. Master rat, squeaking loudly, rushed between the legs of the marine,—who, starting, dropped his lantern,—and got clear off, leaving us in the darkness discomfited.

We could but laugh at the result. I left the lieutenant to dress for his watch on deck, and turned into my hammock to sleep the blissful sleep known only to 'middle watchers,' a repose too hardly earned by the four clear hours—from twelve to four—sliced out of the night's rest.

But if the going to sleep after watch-keeping be pleasant, what can equal the misery of the waking. The ordinary routine of which is as follows :—Time 6.30 a.m.

Hammock man, jerking the clews—‘ Five bells, sir ; young gentlemen’s hammocks piped up.’

Sleeping midshipman, opening one eye—‘ All right !’ Goes to sleep.

Hammock man waits three minutes. Jerks again, a tremendous one this time—‘ Five bells, sir !’

Sleeping midshipman, opening both eyes—‘ All right, I say !’ Goes to sleep again.

Another pause. Man wants to go to his breakfast. Gets impatient, puts his shoulder under the hammock, nearly shaking the occupant out. ‘ First lieutenant wants to know why the steerage hammocks isn’t lashed up, sir.’

Sleeping midshipman, ‘ Oh ! all right.’ Puts one leg out of bed, contemplates it, leans his head back on the pillow, and—falls asleep again.

The next attempt is successful. Middy turns

out, stumbles towards his chest, coils himself on the top, and there sleeps until his marine servant disturbs him from even that last haven of rest by coming to lay out his washing traps.

This experience enables one to understand the proceedings of the old boatswain, of whom it is told that when comfortably settled on shore for life he enhanced his cup of happiness by ordering his servant to call him every morning with the same words :—

‘Four o’clock, sir ! The first lieutenant wants you on deck immediately.’

‘Oh ! He does, does he ! Is he in a hurry ?’

‘Yes, sir ! He says you must come direckly—or rather sooner.’

‘Then you just go and tell the first lieutenant that I SHAN’T COME !’

And with that he delightedly pulls the blankets round him again.

I went through the usual routine that morning as on so many mornings before, and was not thorough-

ly awake until my face was immersed in the pint of water allowed for washing. We were rather short of water just at that time; and when the washing portion had been put aside and the mess steward had taken enough to give one cup of tea in the morning and one at night, about a pint remained for each person. Mine I always poured into a wine bottle, corked it up, and stowed it in my chest. Finding, though, that whenever in that thirsty climate the neck of the bottle was lifted to our mouths, it was a matter of absolute impossibility to withdraw it until the whole of the delicious contents had gurgled down our throats, we hit upon a plan of piercing the cork with a quill, through which, by sucking the water slowly, our pleasure was greatly prolonged.

Breakfast that day in the midshipmen's berth consisted of the single cup of tea—needless to remark, without milk—and biscuit previously rebaked in the oven to kill the insects with which it was infested. When the weevils were well baked they

would tumble out, on the biscuit being smartly tapped on the table, which they declined doing when alive. Right glad, then, were we when the quartermaster came down with the news that there was a large canoe coming off, and that the captain had given orders to prepare to anchor; for visions of fruit and other luxuries flashed across our mental vision.

I went on deck, and found that we were about three miles from the land, nearly abreast the large native town of Badagry. The *Planet's* anchor was soon dropped, sails clewed up, but not furled; and we were at liberty to watch the canoe, a fine flat-bottomed boat with straight sides standing high out of the water. Paddled by sixteen sturdy blacks, guiltless of clothing save a cloth round their loins and shouting in unison with each stroke of the paddles, the canoe came alongside, and the headman stepping on board presented a letter, saying, in broken English, 'White man at Badagry send book for captain.'

While Captain Dentloup was engaged in reading his letter, the miscellaneous cargo of the canoe, consisting of fowls and eggs, with bananas and other fruit, was handed on deck, and quickly found purchasers among the officers and seamen. All was paid for in the ordinary currency of the coast, namely, 'cut-monies' (Spanish dollars cut into four), and Manchester cottons—technically called 'trade cloth,' and sold by the fathom.

'How much this fowl, John?' says the steward, pointing to the bird.

The native, comprehending the gesture, replies, 'One fadom,' and the exchange is made; the cloth being measured by the purchaser stretching out his arms at full length, the space between the hands in that position always counting as a fathom, be the arms long or short. I ventured on a little trading speculation on my own account, exchanging six bright uniform waistcoat buttons for a basket of eggs, to the mutual satisfaction of myself and a remarkably ugly specimen of negro humanity,

Now the headman, after giving his 'book' to the captain, had not joined in the bartering, but remained on the quarter-deck, uttering to the nearest bystander the monosyllabic word 'rum.' So we took him below to the berth, and hospitably regaled him with a glass of his favourite fluid. There was nothing for him to eat but biscuit, which, when spread over first with a layer of tallow and then one of cayenne pepper, he relished much. We tried to get some information from this man with regard to the slave traffic; but on the word 'slave' being mentioned he broke out as follows:—

'Spanish man good! Portugee man good! Him buy slave, gib plenty rum and cloth for him. Inglis man no good! He no buy slave, he go *tief* him from Portugee man.'

It seems rather hard that after England's great sacrifices to put down this horrible trade such should be the native view of her policy. Still this African, doubtless a slave-dealer himself in a small way, can scarce be accepted as an unprejudiced witness.

The quarter-master of the watch now put his head inside the berth. ‘The captain wants you on deck, Mr Murray.’ I jumped up, and Captain Dentloup told me that the letter brought on board was from the missionaries at Badagry, who, observing an English cruiser off the town, had sent to beg medical assistance on behalf of one of their number dangerously ill with fever. The assistant surgeon was going to land in the canoe, remaining till Monday (to-day being Saturday), and I was to accompany him.

How delighted I was with the prospect of this delicious run ashore in strange latitudes, let those say who know what it is to be cooped up for months in a small craft. I was the envy of the mess on going below to get a few things ready.

‘I say, Murray, it’s a shame ! Why doesn’t the captain send me ?’ almost blubbered out Sandford, my brother (and senior) mid, a nice fair-haired boy.’

‘Don’t you know the reason ?’ exclaimed Forrester, the mate. ‘Why, you are much too nice-

looking, Sandford ; the cannibals would eat you to a certainty. But as for the doctor and Murray—well, I don't like to make unpleasant remarks!—only I pity the Ashantee who will have the picking of *their* bones.'

I was quite able to join in the laugh which this sally caused ; and after hearty 'good-byes,' Dr Gilbert and myself seated ourselves in the stern of the canoe, the headman at our side with the paddle which served him in place of a rudder ; and our voyage in quest of adventures commenced.

CHAPTER IV.

I MEET WITH A HIPPOPOTAMUS.

AS we neared the shore the doctor, who knew this part of the coast, pointed out how heavily the surf was running on the open beach where we had to land, remarking that if our crew were not skilful it would be a service of danger. He advised me, if by evil chance we should be capsized, to keep as close as possible to the boat, so that the blacks, who are capital swimmers, might lend me à helping hand.

A quarter of an hour brought us to the outer edge of the surf, where we remained for a time in the smooth water, just where the immense rollers began to rise, but at a safe distance from the breaking point in their passage towards the shore. While in

this state of suspense, half deafened by the noise of the waters, with the men resting on their paddles, keeping the boat end-on to the sea, and anxiously looking out for the coming of a wave large enough to bear us safely on its crest to the beach, it by no means added to our comfort to discover by the dorsal fins of several large sharks, what enemies were watching for us in the water. My companion, however, observed that they would not catch us alive, as the creatures never ventured inside the surf, but waited at the margin for any drowned thing that might float out.

'Say a prayer, Murray,' suddenly whispered the doctor in my ear. The men, with a simultaneous shout, begin to paddle furiously towards the shore. I look behind and see an enormous roller advancing upon us. On it comes with huge force, carrying our frail canoe high upon its bosom with tremendous velocity. It is a grand moment of excitement as we rush thus upborne through the air. A few seconds more and we shall be high on the beach,

safe from the return of the next sea. But no! the wave breaks—its force is expended too soon. In a whirl of foaming waters, half suffocated, we cling to the sides of the canoe. The crew still paddle on gallantly, but all their strength avails nothing; we are carried out again by the receding wave. I look up, a wall of water overhangs us—it curls—it breaks—dashing us out of the boat in all directions. I strike out, struggling to rise to the surface, but receive a sudden blow and become senseless.

My next remembrance is of lying on a sandy beach, and seeing strange, kindly faces, white and black, bending over me. Then I hear the doctor's voice, and soon find myself not much the worse for the adventure, save an aching head. It appeared I had been struck by the canoe when under water, stunned, and must undoubtedly have been drowned had it not been for the exertions of the canoe men, who brought Dr Gilbert and myself safely to land. We tried to make the brave fellows understand how grateful we were, and, to their great delight, pre-

sented them with the few dollars we had in our pockets.

Two of the missionaries had come to meet us on landing, and as soon as our walking powers were a little restored we started for their houses. A lagoon runs along the coast, which must be crossed in order to reach Badagry. As we were rowed across in the small canoe which our new friends had in readiness, we admired the scenery, the country being more hilly than any we had seen of late, and the lagoon at this point presenting the appearance of a noble river some three hundred yards wide. We were too tired, though, to care much for anything except rest, and most thankful were we when, after marching through a lane of the inhabitants who crowded to see the officers of the Queen of England's 'big war-canoe,' we reached the mission quarters. We were taken at once to our rooms, and throwing myself on a bed, I slept for some hours.

Awaking quite refreshed, I joined our hosts, who were in good spirits from a favourable report of Dr

Gilbert on their sick brother, and we sat down to a delicious repast. Perhaps all shore-going meals are sweet to a midshipman who has not put foot out of the ship for three or four months. But three special tropical delicacies met with our warm approval : ‘ochra soup,’ made with the vegetable of that name rich and invigorating ; ‘palm-oil chop,’ lovely with its golden tint of palm oil and hot with its red pepper ; and palm wine, cool and pure, drawn from the tree that morning ere sunrise, and drank before it began to ferment and grow heady.

It was pleasant to meet with this bright little spot of Christianity and civilisation, and it made one hope that rays of light would gradually penetrate the dark neighbourhood around. The missionaries spoke in a hopeful, although by no means in a sanguine manner of their work. There had been much to contend with. Opposition from the chiefs ; when that was overcome, fever attacked the mission. Once the town had been burnt down by the king of Dahomey’s army, and, as usual, famine

followed close upon the footsteps of war. At present they said they had nothing to complain of save the hardness and indifference of the natives to Christianity.

The previous Sunday an old chief who had hitherto kept aloof, made his appearance in the little church. Thankful for this good symptom, they spoke to him at the close of the service, trusting to find his heart had been touched. Their hopes were crushed by his first words, ‘Me go church ; how much rum you give me ?’

One of the clergymen was himself of native blood. As we rambled about the place after dinner, he showed me a large tree whose branches shaded half the market-place. Under this very tree, when a boy, he remembered being sold to the slave-dealers. Happily, the ship in which he was embarked was captured by a British cruiser and sent to Sierra Leone. His education, which began there, was completed in England ; he was ordained and eventually came out a missionary to the spot which had wit-

nessed his enslavement. I may as well mention that if memory serves me well, this gentleman who so kindly told the story of his life is the present Bishop Crowther, who has for many years devoted his whole energies to the evangelization of his countrymen.

That evening as we chatted around the tea-table, and especially when before prayers Keble's evening hymn was sung, the low, sweet voice of one of the ladies of the mission being speedily joined by our own louder tones, it was easy in imagination to annihilate the thousands of miles which separated us from loving hearts at home.

Sweeter memories still, breathed upon us on the Sunday. We all met at an early morning service, held in the airy palm-leaf-roofed shed which served for church and school. Kneeling there and listening to the dear familiar words of the English Liturgy read by men whose lives proved that theirs was no mere lip service, I was strangely moved. Prayers which in England had sounded unheeded

in my ears as ‘a tale twice told,’ became instinct with life and meaning ; and the ‘thanksgiving’ rose from my heart as I remembered each separate instance of preservation from pestilence, battle, and wreck.

This feeling of deep gratification in hearing the Church prayers when on foreign service has never since left me ; and those among my young readers whom duty will call to serve their country as brave soldiers or sailors in all quarters of the globe, will know when the time comes, what a cherished link to home those words form, to which doubtless they have often listened carelessly enough at church.

The following morning we were to return to the *Planet*, always provided the surf would permit ; but both Gilbert and myself were determined not to quit the place without exploring the lagoon in search of a hippopotamus. I had a vague idea of having seen an unfortunate specimen once in a menagerie, described by the showman who poked him up with a long stick as an ‘amphibious animal

wot can't live in the land and dies in the water.' But that was very different to encountering him in his native haunts.

So our friends, whom duty prevented from joining the expedition, lent us their own canoe, placing us in charge of two blacks who knew the lagoon well; and armed with a gun apiece, we embarked immediately after breakfast. There was a calabash of water and some cold provision in the boat in case of need, and we paddled off in a state of perfect bliss. Whether we saw the creatures for whom we were in quest, or not, I don't think I much cared. We were our own masters for the time; all was new and therefore all was glorious.

We went along slowly, enjoying the view, the water was smooth, and the banks on either side, clear of mangrove bushes, green and wooded to the water's edge.

'Just like the Thames at Richmond,' I exclaimed, as we came upon a small island in the middle of the stream.

'But no strange'fish like that in the Thames,' said the doctor, pointing out an alligator on the island, which, observing us, now waddled awkwardly to the edge and jumped into the water. I hurriedly caught up a gun and fired, with small success, his tail merely gave a parting wave of defiance as it sunk.

The noise of the shot disturbed flocks of gray parrots, who flew overhead with discordant caws ; and numerous monkeys, chattering loudly, made their appearance in the trees, evidently both curious and angry. We might easily have brought them down, but there was no object to be gained by needlessly destroying these harmless animals. One, however, a fine large black fellow, tempting fate, was rash enough to run along a branch overhanging the water, so close that I was able to touch him with a paddle. Master Jacko, very savage, seized the end, and would not let go. Pull monkey, pull midshipman ! Snarling, and showing his teeth, at last he fell into the water ; and, before we could interfere, was despatched and hauled into the boat

by our men, to whom a black monkey's skin was an article of value.

We had rowed for about an hour after this incident, the sun intensely hot, and ourselves rather weary, not having enjoyed even another shot at the alligators—who, with provoking want of proper feeling, always went ‘flop, flop,’ into the water long before we were within range—when the river opened out into a wide shallow lake, overgrown with rushes and water plants. The men guided the canoe into a spot where the tall reeds grew so luxuriantly that, meeting overhead, they completely excluded the sun's rays : and in this bower of bliss we enjoyed our luncheon and emptied the calabash. One thing only made us feel rather uncomfortable. This part of the lagoon was swarming with water-snakes, who glided round us close to the surface ; and, as the water, though dark, was clear, we saw their wicked-looking eyes, and shuddered at the consequences of a capsizé.

We watched the snakes twisting and turning

until I fell into a doze, from which I was aroused by a sound comparable only to the noise of a dozen bulls drinking and snorting. 'The hippopotamus!' we both exclaimed. Gilbert took up the guns, carefully reloaded both with ball and gave me one; but, observing how I was quivering with intense excitement, made me lay it down again, and waited five minutes. Then, seeing I was calm, he told the two rowers, the black of whose faces fear had relieved with yellow, to move the boat clear of the reeds.

Cautiously we emerged from our concealment, the men using their paddles noiselessly, and there—not twenty yards off—standing with his body half out of the shallow water, loomed the huge bulk of a hippopotamus. It was a glorious moment when I first caught sight of this monarch of the rivers. Utterly unaware of our presence, he remained motionless. His side was partially exposed. We cocked our guns as gently as possible, but the slight sound made him turn his head instantly towards us.

'Steady, Murray. Aim at the eye.'

The two guns made but one report. With a cry, half roar half bellow, the brute charged at us through the shallows, wounded, though not mortally so; but the Badagrians, paddling for dear life, got the canoe into deeper water, where, being obliged to swim, his progress was not so rapid. Still he kept pace with us not many yards astern.

'A stern chase is a long chase,' quoth the doctor, quite cool. 'You load and I'll fire.'

The two natives were now beside themselves with fear, and would have jumped overboard and swam ashore, leaving us to encounter the enemy alone, had not Gilbert pointed his gun and threatened to shoot them if they left off paddling. Meanwhile I loaded and handed the gun to the doctor as fast as possible. Four more shots struck our infuriated pursuer without effect, save that of drawing from him at each discharge a roar of pain and rage—when to our dismay the water again shoaled. On his feet first touching the bottom he

flounders slightly ; this gives us several yards advantage ; our hopes rise. But now the water barely covering his legs he rushes on with a maddening roar, his horrid jaws wide extended. The natives with a yell of fright throw away their paddles and dive. Gilbert fires, but the bullet flattens harmless on the skull. I am handing him the last gun. There is no time, the brute's head nearly touches the muzzle. I fire—he stops short, a convulsive shudder creeps over his massive frame, and slowly and majestically he sinks down. The ball penetrating his left eye had lodged in the brain.

The danger had been too great, the issue too uncertain, for us to enjoy much elevation of spirit at our success. Indeed we were both very grave the rest of the day. Nor even now do I understand why we were permitted to engage in so dangerous a chase, in a small canoe and with such poor fire-arms. The simple explanation perhaps lies in the fact that our friends, not having heard of hippopotami lately, fancied there were none haunting the lagoon.

Our native protectors reappeared now the danger was over, full of delight and admiration of our prowess. The enormous body of the animal was left where it fell, while they paddled us quickly to Badagry, in order to hasten back with their friends and divide the meat before the alligators took the lion's share of the carcase. As for the tusks, the ivory of which is more valuable than that of elephant's teeth, we begged the missionaries to accept them for the benefit of the station.

I believe Dr Gilbert and myself had each experienced as much excitement as we cared for that day. We were consequently glad enough to find that the surf had gone down, so that we should have a smooth-water passage off to the ship. The procession from our kind entertainers' houses down to the beach was not quite so pleasant, for the whole population marched with us; and as each man, woman, and child crowded round and insisted upon shaking hand with the 'slayers of the king of the rivers' before we got into the boat, our state

under the hot sun may be imagined. Indeed I was scarce surprised at Forrester's greeting when I found myself once more in the berth of the dear old *Planet*.

'Well! you certainly are the dirtiest and most disreputable looking midshipman I ever saw!'

CHAPTER V.

THE TORNADO.

WE had a few months' unsuccessful cruising in the Bights after my adventure at Badagry, and then were ordered to the Southern part of the station, touching on our way at the picturesque island of Fernando Po, for water. Taking up a fresh cruising ground off the mouth of the Congo, so many slavers fell into our hands that the crew gave their ship the title of the 'lucky Planet.'

While in the full tide of this success, my waking dreams one night as midshipman of the watch were suddenly cut short by the cheering cry—'Sail ho!'

As an agreeable change in the middle of the rainy season, it chanced to be a starlight night. Soon all sail was made on the ship, in a few

minutes our spars were covered with canvas, and the *Planet* was gliding through the water under the influence of a land-wind which had just sprung up. Our men clustered forward in the bows eagerly trying to make out the chase, but she was as yet visible to no eyes save those of the Krooman who had first reported the strange sail.

The suspense was endured for nearly a quarter of an hour, but at length Captain Dentloup, losing patience, hailed :—

‘King Tom ! you sure you see him ?’

‘Yes, massa captain, him live out *dere*,’ replied the individual bearing the royal cognomen, pointing right ahead.

In a few more minutes the good faith of King Tom was verified, and the strange sail—which we were rapidly overhauling—plainly seen on the line of the horizon.

‘Clear away the gun forward and give her a blank cartridge,’ was an order obeyed as soon as given, and the flash illuminated momentarily the excited

faces on deck. As the report died away, all eyes were bent on the chase to discover if she obeyed that authoritative signal to 'heave to ;' but her white sails still gleamed in the moonlight, and she pursued her course regardless of the mandate. Many of the crew began already in imagination to spend their prize-money ; the Kroomen especially were chuckling with delight, for the very day preceding, at their earnest request, the eyes of the figure-head had been repainted, 'to make him see better.'

The proverbial 'slip between cup and lip,' had, however, yet to be illustrated. The gun having been again loaded, this time with shot, the gunner was standing, lanyard in hand, awaiting the order to fire, when our attention was attracted by the flapping of the sails—which hitherto had kept full—against the masts ; the land wind had suddenly subsided and a hot stifling calm succeeded. On looking round I saw in one quarter of the horizon the small cloud, literally as a man's hand, which to experienced

eyes betokens the quick approach of a tornado ; and we knew well that, if one of these awful tropical storms struck the ship while all sail was set, nothing but the loss of her masts could save her.

No time now to think of aught but the safety of the ship. ‘Hands shorten sail ! Quick, men,—quick,—for your lives !’ shouted the captain. The crew, aware of the danger, worked well ; sail after sail was taken in, until, instead of a cloud of canvas, the cruiser showed nothing aloft but the clear tracery of spars and rigging. In time, and only just in time, was the work completed, the ship made snug and the men down from aloft.

Meanwhile the cloud had rapidly increased in volume until now it overspread half the horizon, the remainder of the heavens being yet bright and clear. The dead silence of expectation was broken by a low growl of thunder. One breath of wind, cold as from a charnel-house, passed over—a few big drops of rain splashed upon the deck. Then closed round the ship the arch of the storm-cloud ; and with a

mighty roar, lashing the water into foam, the tornado swept down upon us.

Notwithstanding all our precautions, the first shock threw the *Planet* nearly on her beam-ends ; for a few moments of painful suspense she remained in that position, then suddenly righting—all her timbers groaning—gradually yielded to her helm.

Immediate danger was now over, it being only necessary to keep the ship driving before the wind until the storm should subside. Released from our deepest anxiety, we were now able to watch—even to enjoy—the magnificent spectacle of an African tornado. In that roaring wind and deafening thunder no man could hear his fellow speak, or in the thick darkness see the rope to which he clung or the deck whereon he stood, save when the blinding lightning at quick recurring intervals disclosed the wild scene around him.

An hour passed thus, and the fury of the tornado began to decrease, when—with a simultaneous crash of thunder—the lightning struck our foremast. On

reaching the deck the electric fluid was first attracted by the chain cable, along which it ran hissing until, reaching the quarter-deck, it leaped with a loud report to the nearest gun, flashing from gun to gun until it plunged into the water astern, Moore the helmsman, as it passed him, ducking his head as he would to an enemy's shot. Happily no one was seriously hurt, although some men standing round the mast were partially stunned. The thunder now ceased, and the wind fell. Quitting my station on the forecastle, I joined the group on the quarter-deck, where we congratulated ourselves that the elements had done their worst, and speculated on the chances of the morning light gladdening our eyes with a view of the lost slaver. In all probability, the tornado had either capsized or driven her far beyond our reach.

It being now midnight, I was stepping, wearily enough, towards the companion-ladder, intending to go below, when I was met by an officer who rushed violently up the ladder and attempted to pass me.

Recognizing our assistant surgeon—who was suffering from a severe attack of yellow fever—I attempted to stop him, but, tearing himself from my grasp with the strength of delirium, he forced his way overboard.

Giving orders to the boatswain's mate to call away the lifeboat's crew, I sprang aft and let go the life-buoy. The portfire attached to the apparatus blazed up, and by its light the form of the doctor was visible, floating rapidly astern. Not a moment was to be lost, and pulling off my jacket, I was quickly in the water at his side. Being a good swimmer, there was little difficulty in supporting him; the shock of the plunge had apparently restored his senses, for he evidently recognized me. A few strokes brought us to the life-buoy, and resting my feet on the lower part under water, one arm clinging to the upper rod, and the other round the waist of my friend, I awaited with impatience the approach of succour from the ship. The situation was by no means agreeable; the half-drowned man

soon lost the little consciousness that remained, and hung a dead weight on my arm. The recent tornado had occasioned a heavy sea ; and, though the life-buoy bore our weight well, yet frequently the waves, dashing over our faces, half-choked me ; and as the light at the *Planet's* masthead dimmed and faded to my eye as we drifted more and more from the ship, so also—fainter and more faint—waned my hopes of deliverance. The portfire was quickly burning out, already its brilliancy had much lessened, and the fine volume of light it had at first given was dwindling into a fitful gushing of sparks, as in a badly-prepared schoolboy's squib. I knew well that, if the light should indeed go out entirely, the boat sent to our aid would row in vain quest of such a speck as the life-buoy ; when morning broke it might be discovered, but long before that time my exhausted arms would have loosened their hold, and our bodies found the sailor's grave.

With despair in my heart I gazed upwards at the portfire, which now suddenly shot forth an expiring

gleam—tinting with a blue unearthly glare the closed eyes and senseless form of my companion : and then all was darkness. But, even at that moment, I heard the welcome sound of the measured beat of oars. Gathering all my strength, I hailed ; the hail was answered cheerily by many strong voices, and guided by my shout the boat discovered our position. Soon friendly hands grasped us, and in another minute I was safely seated in the boat, with Gilbert, still unconscious, by my side.

CHAPTER VI.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

THE boat's crew gave way cheerily for the brig, towing the life-buoy astern. Overhead the sky was clearing, the stars again shone out ; and the black form of our floating home once more became visible—her hull looming large in the obscurity of night.

As we neared the ship I saw that she was rolling heavily in the trough of the sea, and that the act of getting on board and hoisting up the boat would be a perilous one. Nothing, however, could be gained by delay, so seizing what appeared to be a favourable moment, during a temporary lull in the ship's motion, we pulled up alongside. Just as the boat came abreast of the gangway, we rose on the crest

of a wave : a crowd of men were on deck ready to assist us, and into their outstretched arms we literally threw the insensible form of the doctor. Two of our men also leaped on the deck and were safe, but the danger to us who still remained was imminent. Our boat sank with the receding wave, the ship at the same time rolling heavily over to starboard, away from us. With the return roll would come the danger. In vain with desperate efforts we tried with oars to push the boat farther away. Closer and closer yet the power of attraction pressed her to the ship's side. The return roll came. I looked up, saw the heavy dark mass descending remorseless upon our heads ; then a crash, a cry of agony—a few struggling, breathless moments in the dark depths ; and I was floating, half-stunned, but unhurt, on the surface, amidst oars and fragments of the wrecked boat. One poor fellow, whose death-shriek we had heard, had sunk to rise no more, but the others were swimming beside me uninjured.

And now for the best way of getting on board. The 'falls,' or ropes by which the lost boat had been lowered, were hanging from the projecting davits, their ends trailing in the water some six or eight feet from the side ; and to climb up by their assistance was an easy mode of escape for trained sailors.

Swimming therefore to these ropes, I sent my men up first, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing them all safely on board, the ship at this time being tolerably steady. Then grasping the falls I began my own ascent hand over hand. Scarcely had my feet left the water, however, when the rolling motion once more commenced. As the ship inclined gradually over, my feet again touched the surface ; still I descended until the waters closed over my head, and then lower and lower yet—clinging the while to the rope as my only chance of ultimate safety—until at length I felt the downward motion cease. Quickly succeeded a sudden jerk, nearly wrenching my hands from their hold ; and

with a velocity far exceeding that of the descent, a roll of the ship in an opposite direction was dragging me into upper air. It required all my remaining strength to retain my grasp, the opposing pressure of water as I was carried upwards being enormous. At last, panting and exhausted, but with presence of mind still unimpaired, I emerged, and with desperate haste—dreading the coming downward roll—began again to clamber up the rope.

I succeeded in gaining a point about two feet higher than my former position ; another foot or two and I should be safe—already had several men slipped down the ropes, whose hands nearly touched mine. I struggled hard, but with all my efforts could not gain another inch—again the horrible downward motion began, and, while breathless from the last descent, again I was plunged beneath the waters.

It has been averred that, of all deaths, drowning is the most painless ; nay, according to some writers,

it is even agreeable : that, after a rapid review of past existence, the mind appears to ‘ babble of green fields,’ a delicious dreamy mistiness steals over the senses, and the dying man gradually and pleasantly glides over the boundary which separates life from death. I cannot say—such may possibly have been the case with many—but my own experience of the sensations of drowning, extending even to the verge of absolute unconsciousness, is far different. The agony of this second immersion was almost insupportable. As in the first instance, I sank slowly, then after a momentary pause was dragged violently upwards, the resisting body of water clinging to me as if loth to lose its prey. Once more my face reached the surface. I caught the hands stretched down towards me and managed this time to gain the deck, safe though half drowned.

It is but anticipating my story a little to say that the doctor was eventually none the worse for his ducking, and that when I saw him the next

day he was sleeping calmly, with no trace of fever left.

In these southern latitudes no soft intervening twilight exists ; the change from obscure night to glaring broiling day is almost instantaneous. No sooner did day break on the following morning, and the sun appear, than all eyes were anxiously engaged sweeping the horizon in hopes of encountering the lost slaver. Fifty voices quickly exclaimed, 'There she is !' and there indeed, not two miles off, was the luckless vessel, which even the tornado had failed to save. The sea was calm, and it was evident to the crew of the slave-ship that no chance of escape remained ; although armed, they were no match for the English cruiser. Soon a Brazilian ensign fluttered up to her masthead, waved there for a moment, and then slowly and reluctantly descended, in token of surrender.

Our boats, well manned and armed, now pulled towards the prize, passing through some dozens of empty wine and ale bottles recently thrown over-

board, showing that the slave-crew had begun to drown their sorrows in the good liquor that the cabin stores afforded, determined it should not be wasted down the throats of their captors.

On boarding and taking possession, the prize proved to be the *Aventureiro*, a fine yacht-like schooner, carrying one long swivel gun amidships. Small need was there to inquire of her sullen commander whether he was engaged in lawful or ‘contraband’ traffic, for although the cargo of negroes had not been yet shipped, the vessel was fitted with a slave deck large enough to hold two hundred.

The crew of the slaver, twenty-four in all, were transferred to the *Planet*, and an officer and party of men detailed to convey the prize to Sierra Leone. Before parting company, however, we enjoyed a hunt after good things which—although articles of daily consumption on shore—were luxuries to men shut up for months in an African cruiser.

Tins of preserved meats, sardines, potted salmon and lobster, boxes of crystallized sugar, raisins,

potatoes, butter, wine, and bottled pale ale rewarded the laughing plunderers; and were passed into the ship under the very eye of the slave-captain, who, as he leaned over the side, muttered the not inappropriate word, 'Ladrones!' Soon, however, his face cleared up, and ejaculating 'Fortuna de la guerra!' he smoked his paper cheroot with calmness, consoled doubtless by the recollection of former successful trips. Slave-traders confess that if only one vessel out of four escapes, they are amply repaid.

Then, all arrangements being complete, the prize-crew gave a hearty farewell cheer as the *Aventureiro*, with England's flag of liberty waving at the peak, bore away to the westward, a cheer returned as heartily by us in the *Planet*, as that vessel's head was once more turned towards her cruising ground.

CHAPTER VII.

PIRATES' CREEK.

'A WAY there! first and second gigs. Gigs' crews to muster on deck with their arms,' bawled out the boatswain's mate after the usual preparatory twitter of his silver call.

The first gig was in charge of Forrester, the mate, and the second in mine, so, very reluctantly, I got up from the hard lockers of the midshipmen's berth, where we had been enjoying an afternoon siesta, and in obedience to the pipe went on the quarter-deck to Captain Dentloup, who gave us our orders.

'Now, Mr Forrester and you Mr Murray, you are both aware that for some days we have been watching the mouth of the Congo, in hopes of in-

tercepting a vessel which is believed to be lying concealed some miles up the river, in readiness to start with a full cargo of slaves. There can be little doubt that a watch is kept upon our proceedings, therefore I mean to set a trap for her. This evening we shall quit our cruising ground and sail some twenty miles to the southward, leaving the coast apparently clear. But as soon as it is dark you shall shove off in the two boats, taking four days' provisions, and conceal yourselves close inshore. I shall be very disappointed if the slaver does not drop down the river comfortably into your hands.'

Then the captain added, turning to me :—

'They may show fight, and you are rather young for this sort of work, Murray, but you have been with me for two years now, and I know you will do your duty.'

I coloured with pleasure when the captain spoke like this, but having no words ready, Forrester, the irrepressible, answered for me.

'I would rather have him with me than any one, Sir. Didn't he save my life on board the *Dolorida* when the Spaniard was cutting me down? to say nothing of his shooting the hippopotamus at Badagry.'

We went to work now, got the boats lowered, and kept them on the off-side of the ship, out of sight of any watchers on shore. In an hour we were all ready. Then, after a parting cup of tea in the berth, we cast off from the *Planet* and pulled slowly with muffled oars towards the land, the tall white sails of our floating home slowly vanishing in the gloom. As the boats shoyed off the men began to jump up in the rigging to give us a cheer; but we heard the captain hurriedly call them down, and say: 'Do you want to spoil it all, men!'

'Yes,' said Forrester to me, quietly, 'and it will be time enough to cheer when we get back.'

The gigs were six-oared boats, so that we numbered fourteen in all, twelve blue-jackets and two officers, Forrester and myself. Every man had his

musket and cutlass, and in addition there were two long boarding-pikes and two pistols in each boat. One of the pistols I gave to Moore, the quartermaster, who was my stroke oar, and kept the other for my own use.

In the way of provisions we had salt pork ready boiled, biscuit, cocoa, tea, a keg of rum, and water in barricoes—or small four-gallon casks. The surgeon had also presented us with a large jar of quinine and wine, telling us to take a wine-glassful each man in the early morning, as a safeguard from fever. A small portable stove was placed in my boat, with charcoal for fuel, that we might enjoy the luxury of hot tea without fear of the smoke betraying our position. In fact, as I overheard Moore saying, ‘It was a regular jolly pic-nic, with the chance, too, of a fight.’

One hour’s pulling brought us to Shark’s Point, at the southern entrance to the Congo, which is here deep and broad enough for line-of-battle ships. We thought to have found some place on this side

of the river suitable for our purpose ; but the current was so strong—running about five knots an hour—that after struggling against it some time, gaining a few yards one minute only to be swept back the next, we gave it up for a bad job, and steered for the northern or right bank of the river, which we soon gained.

We could just make out that we were close to an inlet, called in memory of deeds of blood once done there, Pirates' Creek, and into this creek we cautiously steered. A dark and horrid place it was. As the trees meeting overhead gradually shut out all view of the sky, I felt as if we were entering a vault, and the cold, damp air and miasma from the mangrove bushes which lined the muddy banks made me shiver.

Forrester, not liking the idea of pushing the bows of the boats among these mangroves, where snakes and reptiles might ‘make night horrid,’ anchored both the boats in the middle of the creek ; and the oars being laid in, the two gigs swung to the current, lovingly, side by side.

'Now then, my lads, you may make yourselves comfortable ; we shall see nothing of the slaver to-night.'

This order was obeyed better than might have been expected under the circumstances. The little stove being lighted, a cup of hot tea, followed by the evening ration of rum, made the dry biscuit go down without much difficulty. Then, blanket frocks having been put on over serges, the men lighted their pipes, and stretched their legs out, or rather tried to, for a good stretch was out of the question.

'I say, Moore, spin us a yarn, a good one now,' cried several voices ; and Forrester and I, who had more than once found the old quartermaster's stories make a middle watch pass lightly, listened.

'Well, boys, here's a yarn my old father told me. He was an admiral's steward, and in course used to listen to what the big wigs talked about while he was waiting at dinner. He called it "How the Post-Captain weathered the First Lord."

' It was in the old war time of course, and this captain — Pullimore was his name — had been brought to book by the Admiralty for not being in proper uniform, which rather riled him. But one day soon afterwards, he was ordered up to London, and he thought of a way of paying their lordships out. Officers used to go to Whitehall in uniform in those days, although I hear they needn't do so now. So in he goes to the board-room dressed quite regular—but with a *white* cocked hat.

' The first lord stares, and calls out,—

' "Captain Pullimore! you are not in uniform, sir."

" "I beg your pardon, strict uniform, my lord." Then he pulls the printed regulations out of his pocket and reads, "*Coat—Double-breasted, ten buttons in each row three inches apart; gold lace, inch and half wide. Trousers—Gold lace, inch and half.*"—"Yes, my lord, quite correct."

" "But your hat, sir, your hat!"

" "My hat." He reads again, "*Hat—Cocked, flaps*

eight and half inches in the back, seven and half in the front." A two-foot rule comes out of his pocket now, and he measures the hat carefully, "Yes, my lord, exactly the size, I do assure you."

"But the colour, sir, the colour!"

"Oh! The colour, my lord, not a word said here about the colour, allow me to hand your lordship the regulations."

'It was quite true. So the captain came off with flying colours; and next day there was a new order, with this word "black" put in.'

We laughed, as well as the men, at this yarn; and Forrester said to me, 'They tell another good story about the same officer.'

'The allowance of paint in those days was very meagre, and Captain Pullimore remonstrated, but to no avail; the Admiralty replied that they could grant no more. Then he wrote again, saying that the supply was really only enough to paint half the ship. The answer came, "The regulated allowance could not be exceeded." Nothing daunted, he re-

turned to the charge—"Would their lordships be pleased to say *which side* of the ship he was to paint?"'

We talked on till midnight, our men having dropped off to sleep some time before. Then I made a pillow of one of the water-kegs, and wrapping myself well up in a blanket-coat, contrived, after some skirmishing with the mosquitoes—who having discovered our position were thirsting for English blood—to get some hours' uneasy rest.

I suppose it would be difficult to find a more unhealthy place in which to spend the night in an open boat, than Pirates' Creek. We awoke at daylight, cold, cramped, and shivering, our clothes saturated with damp. Such a collection of yellow faces! We blessed the doctor for his forethought as we each took a glass of his quinine wine. Cocoa and biscuit for breakfast afterwards made us fit for anything.

Unluckily we had nothing whatever to do. The expected prize would not come down while daylight

lasted, and we dared not betray the fact of our presence by leaving the creek and rowing openly on the river. We must while away the hours as well as we could : but a long, long day it seemed. There were some books in the boats ; Moore, too, had brought a fishing line, with which I was speedily at work, and to my delight pulled up several fine fish to eke out our scanty dinner.

After about an hour's successful sport, I felt a tremendous tug at the line, which was a strong one for deep-sea fishing. It deepened into a steady pull, more than my arms could bear.

'Here's either a big conger or a shark !' I exclaimed, leaning half out of the boat to prevent the line being carried right out of my hands. The words were scarce out of my mouth when I was fairly dragged overboard and pulled down to a considerable depth. At last I let go, and rising to the surface, swam to the boat. I did not mind the ducking, but the water was horribly muddy and black. Forrester helped me in, laughing at the fish having

nearly caught me instead of my catching the fish.

Meanwhile Moore had dexterously stopped that part of the line which was still inboard from running quite out, and now with another man was steadily hauling in.

'If it's a shark he will be smashing the boat with his tail,' I said ; and told a man to stand by in readiness with a boarding pike. In another ten minutes a young shark, five feet long, came to the top, struggling furiously and lashing the water all over us. A clever thrust with the pike prevented his doing any mischief, and then the men despatched the creature with their cutlasses, the black water being reddened with his blood.

Sailors always look upon sharks as merciless enemies, to whom is to be shown no mercy—not to be wondered at, perhaps, under the circumstances of their lives. After one has been killed, there is always great curiosity to know what he has got inside him. In this instance the investigation disclosed the hand of a young negro child. Before

this discovery there had been some talk of eating the more delicate portions of the shark, but now in disgust it was allowed to float away with the tide.

While drying myself as well as I could after my unexpected bath, Forrester said, laughing :

'Do you remember our first crossing the line? Well, when you came up sputtering the Congo water out of your mouth, you looked just as you did when Neptune's myrmidons brought you on deck on that occasion.'

It was not likely I had forgotten the scene to which he alluded, and in which I was the sufferer, he only a calm spectator. We, youngsters, who had not undergone the ordeal of 'shaving,' were kept below on that day, and not allowed to see the preparations for our torture. Of course, we tried very hard to 'make believe' we were not afraid, but it was a poor pretence ; and the agony of waiting dressed—or rather undressed—for the ceremony, until we were called up, was awful. At last the hatchway was uncovered. Two men ran down the

ladder, our hearts beating time to their footsteps. They entered the midshipmen's berth, where we sat like victims in the Reign of Terror expecting the summons to the guillotine.

'Mr Murray,' called out an executioner, reading my name from a paper in his hand.

'Here!' answered I, rising and making last preparations for the block by taking off neckerchief and collar—jacket and waistcoat were already off.

Instantly I was seized by each arm, blindfolded with a wet swab, and hurried on deck. Shouts of laughter from officers and men greeted my appearance. The sense of the ludicrous at once overcame my fears; I also joined in the hearty roar. But at that moment the tormentors seized the opportunity and basely pointed the tubes of the fire-engine into my wide-open, unsuspecting mouth! Oh, me! How that laugh was stopped midway—choked, drowned, forced down my throat in company with gallons of salt water.

The contents of bucket after bucket were now

showered upon my head as they led me, still blindfolded, to a seat on a handspike, treacherously placed on the edge of a sail full of water. Neptune, his wife, and his barber, were sitting here in state : the royal personages in gilt diadems resting upon sea-blue wigs made of rope-yarn which curled down to their waists, a gun-carriage doing duty as chariot.

A dash of tar on my cheeks and a scrape from Neptune's razor—an old iron hoop—having been undergone, His Majesty asked how long I had been in his dominions. Knowing full well that the wicked barber standing by was only waiting for my mouth to open in order that he might pop his tar brush in, I made no answer, but kept my lips firmly closed. Then, at a signal from Neptune, the seat was pulled away, and over head and ears went I into the water. This ducking ended my ordeal : henceforth I was free of the sea. I struggled out, dripping, from the other side of the sail, happy enough that my part of the play was over, and firmly persuaded that now I was a 'regular old salt.'

Recalling these old scenes, we chatted pleasantly at dinner. Then, at length, the long, hot afternoon hours passed away. Night came on suddenly, and we began to prepare for the coming fight, or surprise without a fight,—there was no knowing which of the two it would turn out. The weather suited our purpose. There were no clouds in the sky, and although a mist was creeping over the water, yet a young moon gave sufficient light to enable us to see anything coming down the river. We got the boats' anchors up, and pulled to the entrance of the creek, where, keeping still under the shadow of the trees, we rested on our oars.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

TWO hours were spent without anything happening to relieve the tedium of our watch, when Forrester's 'Hush !' silenced the whispering of the boats' crews. We listened—Yes. There was the unmistakeable far-off sound of voices. A few more minutes, and we heard the creaking of masts and cordage. Then the dim outlines of sails were visible through the mist, over a low neck of land two hundred yards up the river. And at last, rounding the point, a large schooner came in view, shadowy and ghost-like in the dim light.

'Never mind your muskets, men,' said Forrester, as he saw them fingering and cocking their arms. 'Have your cutlasses ready, and the moment we

touch her side, jump on board. Murray, you will engage on the starboard side, and I on the port.'

The slaver was nearly abreast of us now, the sound of voices on board had ceased. Noiseless as a phantom ship, the current bore her swiftly towards the sea.

'Now, men, are you ready?'

'All ready, sir.'

'Then give way,' he shouted, 'and hurrah for the old *Planet*!'

The twelve oars of the two boats dropped into the water at the word. One good cheer, and in a few minutes we were alongside. 'An easy victory this,' I thought, as the bow-oar struck his boat-hook in the main chains, and held on without opposition. Much was I mistaken. On jumping up, sword in hand, on the schooner's gunwale, Moore and my boat's crew following, we found all progress barred by a boarding netting, which, triced up to the yard arms, interposed between us and the deck. While struggling with this unexpected obstacle, a cheer

rose from the slaver's decks, and the scene was lit up by the flashes of a dozen muskets. The sudden glare disclosed the forms of our opponents, who, until then, had been concealed behind the bulwarks, and showed Forrester and his men on the other side of the ship slashing away at the netting—which went quite round the vessel—with their cutlasses.

The discharge did some evil work ; two of our poor fellows fell heavily back into the boat. Only Moore and two men stood by my side. I could see no chance of cutting our way through the horrid network before the enemy would be ready with another volley, which would about finish us. Already the rattling of ramrods showed they were re-loading, so I called out—

‘ Back into your boat, and bring up your muskets.’

They sprung down, leaving me alone, holding on by the rigging, and gradually cutting a hole through the netting.

At this moment, happening to look forward, I

made out the figure of a man who had stealthily crept over the side, and, axe in hand, was in the very act of lifting it in order to cut off the head of the boat-hook. If he succeeded, and the boat, with its crew, were cast adrift, we were ruined. I drew out my pistol, yet unused, fired, and—missed ! The white splinters flew from a spot close by the fellow's head. I could see the faint glimmer of light on the axe as he started. Then the weapon was raised again, but ere it could descend, a boarding pike thrown javelin-wise by Moore, hurtled past and buried itself in the poor wretch's side. With a shriek which for the time silenced all other sounds, he loosened his hold, clutched vainly at the vessel's side as he fell, and was swallowed up in the depths of the muddy waters.

The cry and appalling fate of this miserable being for the moment unnerved his comrades. There was a pause. Before they could recover themselves to give a second volley, the three men were again by my side and firing right in their faces, Forrester's

party also blazing away at the same time. The group on the deck seemed to waver,—only a shot or two was returned.

And now at length by cutting and tearing I had made a tolerable hole through the boarding netting. We forced our way through and leaped on the quarter-deck just as a cheer from the opposite side told us our friends had done the same. As my feet touched the deck I saw facing me a tall fellow with his musket clubbed, the butt-end lifted up and about to fall upon my head. Had it thus fallen, my career in Her Majesty's navy had then and there ended, and this story had never been told. But I had time to jump on one side, and the weapon grazed my shoulder harmless. Before it could be raised again my sword was through the man's arm. Disengaging it, I looked round.

Our opponents were crying '*Misericorde!*' throwing down their arms and running forward to conceal themselves. One figure only was to be seen, standing by the tiller—evidently the captain. Forrester,

giving me a warm grasp of the hand, walked aft, saying—

‘You surrender, Señor?’

The answer was a pistol-shot. My poor messmate stopped short, staggered, and would have fallen; but I caught him in time and laid him gently down on the deck, supporting his head in my arms. Moore, a fine stalwart six-foot Devonshire man, ran aft and with one blow of his fist knocked the slave captain down.

‘What shall I do with him, sir. Shall I pitch him overboard?’

‘No, no,’ I replied. ‘Lash his hands and feet securely, and leave him there. Then take the helm and look after the schooner, for her sails are all aback.’

Forrester now claimed my first care. The coxswain of his boat, who—like all his boat’s crew—was devoted to him, helped me, and together we searched for the wound, which I much feared would be mortal. To our relief we found the pistol-ball

had struck only the upper part of the leg, but still the blood was welling out profusely. With a handkerchief twisted tightly round the limb, we managed at length to stop the bleeding. Then having made him as comfortable as we could, and covered him up with a blanket coat, I was able to take in the position of affairs.

I felt rather proud of my first command, on looking round, and observing what a fine prize she was. There was a long brass gun amidships, and why it was not fired as we came alongside—our attack being evidently expected—it was difficult to say. However, there was little time for reflection or enjoyment of the sweets of command ; it was necessary to act at once. The vessel was certainly so far won ; but what was won had to be kept. The question was, ‘Would the beaten crew, when they discovered our weakness, remain quiet, without attempting a rescue ?’ I called our men together to ascertain how many were fit for action, and found that seven, besides myself, were all right ; Forrester and five

others being quite disabled. Well, eight British sailors *ought* to be sufficient to keep a slaver's crew in order. Pirates and cut-throats though they were, there could not be more than twenty left, for several were lying on the decks dead or wounded.

Moore now proved himself an invaluable first lieutenant.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' he called out from the helm, 'won't you anchor, and then we shall have nothing else to do but secure the ruffians?'

A capital suggestion. Looking over the side I found that in the ten or fifteen minutes which had elapsed since we began the attack, the current and the land-wind together had carried the schooner, with our two boats towing alongside, well clear of the mouth of the river outside Shark's Point. The next thing was to see if the anchor was clear, all ready for letting go. I ran forward, glanced over the bows ;—yes, there it was with the black Congo mud clinging to it, just in the same state as when hove up an hour or two ago. I gave the order;

and in another five minutes we were quietly at anchor, sails clewed up, and Moore at liberty to leave the helm and join me.

So far so good. But the pressing danger yet remained. We were longing to release the unhappy slaves below, but could do nothing while the defeated crew, out-numbering us three to one, were unsecured. The young moon was fast sinking below the horizon ; it was not yet midnight ; there were six or seven hours of darkness still to be got through, nor could the return of the *Planet* be hoped for before next morning at the earliest.

I had come aft when busy in anchoring the prize, but now having carefully reloaded my pistol, hurried again to the bows, Moore and our six men following. We were only just in time. Two men, musket in hand, had already made their way on deck, and the small hatchway forward was full of others struggling to follow. The first two we seized and disarmed in a moment ; the rest jumped down and began to fire through the hatchway, but see-

ing our men with levelled muskets, ceased firing.

'Do you surrender?' I demanded, in the mongrel Spanish we had picked up on the coast. 'If not we fire.'

Mingled sounds arose from the darkness below of loud disputing; curses, and even blows; but at last came a shout—' *Si, Señor! Si!*'

At which I ordered them to come on deck one at a time, bringing their arms with them.

I knelt down, and as each man in turn appeared above the hatchway, kept my pistol pointed at his head, while Moore took away his arms and handed him over to our fellows, who now began to take it quite as a joke, and binding their prisoners hand and foot, laid them in regular lines along the deck, patting each on the back as he was finished. It was a long job, twenty-four in all we counted, which with five killed or wounded, and the captain, made up a crew of thirty. Taking a lantern, which Moore found below, I passed the light over each scowling upturned face, and from every eye there

flashed back a glance of malignant hatred. Pirate and murderer seemed written on every feature, and when soon afterwards I went into the cabin and discovered books and charts lying about with different ships' names written on them, our suspicions that the schooner was a pirate as well as slaver, were confirmed. I rummaged among the papers to find the name of our prize, but she owned to neither name or nation. The chart showed she had come lately from Havannah, and the crew were about half Spanish, half Brazilian. It was pleasant to reflect that her career of crime was cut short.

I breathed freely now. We were secure, and could begin to release the slaves, who all this time had been closely shut up below, frightened enough at the noise going on over their heads, but ignorant that the struggle was one in which their interests were so deeply involved.

When we opened the hatches we saw the poor wretches huddled together, manacled two and two, without any sort of arrangement. Apparently they

had been hurried on board at the news of the *Planet* being off her cruising station, and thrown down anyhow until the schooner should be safely at sea. The wonder was that none were already suffocated. There were two hundred men and boys, and twenty women—some with babies. It was really beautiful to see how tenderly our sailors treated these women as they knocked off their irons and lifted them on deck.

The men among these slaves—no longer slaves, though, now, thank God!—seemed almost stupefied ; but the women, observing their late captors lying captive and bound, understood at a glance what had happened, and began a queer sort of song and war-dance of triumph over them. This they diversified with an occasional cuff on the head, and were proceeding to acts of greater violence—magnanimity towards a fallen enemy not being a virtue of savage tribes—had I not thought it time to put a stop to their little amusements, rather to the regret of my own men, who were enjoying the fun.

We could do nothing more now than attend to the wounded and wait patiently—or impatiently—for the morning, which we hoped would bring with it the dear old *Planet*; so after placing sentries over the prisoners I sat down by the side of Forrester. Struck by the faintness of his voice as he answered my inquiries, I called for a light, and was alarmed at the pale, pinched look which had crept over his features. Suspecting something wrong I examined the wound, found it was bleeding, and that he had evidently lost a considerable quantity of blood. With difficulty I managed to replace the bandages. Then recollecting there was a bottle of brandy on the cabin table, I had it brought up and poured a small quantity down his throat, which fetched some colour back into his white cheeks and lips.

Sailors pick up a smattering of all sorts of knowledge at sea, and I had seen our doctor, when his patients seemed dying from sheer weakness after yellow fever, keep them up with small doses of

brandy. After the same fashion I now dealt with Forrester ; placing my fingers on his pulse, and as soon as it appeared to be dying away under the touch, putting the glass to his lips.

I loved this man dearly. His manner was sometimes rough—mates (they are called sub-lieutenants now-a-days) were apt to become soured after waiting six or seven years for their lieutenant's commission—but he ruled the riotous spirits in the midshipmen's berth with wise authority, and would allow no bullying. He had been as an elder brother to me the two years we had been messmates, and helped me out of many a scrape. And now the poor fellow was about to die, I thought, just when this successful attack and his wound must have given him promotion ! It did seem hard.

I think that was the very longest night of my life. At one time, about five o'clock in the morning, I fancied my patient was really gone : I could find no pulse whatever. But he swallowed some brandy and got better again, and afterwards seemed

not to sink so low. I remembered the saying, ‘It’s darkest just before the dawn.’

And the blessed dawn herself came in another half-hour, and with her came the *Planet*. I got up, scarcely able to stand on my cramped legs, and saw with delight her sails, about a mile off. We hoisted the English ensign at the mast-head to show that we were in possession. Then we watched two boats lowered from the cruiser’s side, in one of which, as it came closer, we made out Captain Dentloup with Dr Gilbert. They sprang on board, shook my hand heartily, looked round.

‘But where is Forrester?’

I took them to the spot where he lay, pale as death, with bandages soaked in blood. Gilbert’s face was very grave as he inspected the wound, and asked what had been given him. I told him, and was rewarded by his saying :

‘You could not have done better; nothing else would have kept him up during the small hours.

But you need not look so frightened ; he will do well enough now, please God !'

'Yes,' said Captain Dentloup, 'and live to wear the epaulettes he has won !'

We lifted the wounded into the boat as carefully as possible, Dr Gilbert going with us to the *Planet*. I saw Forrester made snug and comfortable in a bed made up for the purpose in the captain's cabin, and then having time to realize the fact that I was dead beat, stumbled to my hammock, and was fast asleep almost before my head touched the pillow.

CHAPTER IX.

A MIDSHIPMAN'S FIRST COMMAND.

IT was the second morning after our successful night attack in Pirates' Creek, and the slave schooner, our beautiful prize, was still lying at anchor within a biscuit-throw of the *Planet*. The day was intensely hot, and the small party of five who were sitting at breakfast in the midshipmen's berth, finding the weight even of white jackets too oppressive, had thrown them off in the vain hope of coolness, and now presented a light and airy appearance in white duck trousers and shirt sleeves—a most delusive appearance!—for while drinking our milkless tea, the beads of moisture coursed down our cheeks, *drip, drip*, like a shower of small shot. I could stand it no longer, and called out to the black steward :—

'Give me my jacket, Tom, I'm going on deck.'

'Yes, Massa Murray.'

But as the steward lifted the jacket from the peg where it hung, he gave a yell and dropped it. His fingers had touched a large centipede hidden behind the folds.

'Don't kill it, cried the assistant-surgeon. 'It's a lovely specimen, I must preserve it in spirits.' And he ran out of the berth for a pair of forceps.

'Yes, very lovely,' I said, as, on looking up, I saw the horrible reddish-brown creature about seven inches long, curled like the letter S; all its countless legs in motion, with the fore part of its body raised and twisting about apparently in the act of dropping on my head. 'But how am I to preserve *my* spirits when he bites me?'

The doctor came back as I jumped out of the way, and, with his forceps, caught the centipede cleverly in the middle. The thing tried hard to get at its enemy, twisting and twining like an eel. We began to have doubts whether the instrument w?

quite long enough to save the doctor's fingers. In another moment there was no doubt at all in the matter; he dashed the venomous creature, forceps and all, to the deck, only just in time to escape its dangerous bite, and uttered no word of reproach as he witnessed his 'specimen' trodden to death.

Centipedes were becoming rather too numerous on board. Only a few days previously, Captain Dentloup, when pulling on a long wellington boot, felt something moving about inside. Feeling that if he attempted to withdraw his foot he must be bitten, he stamped it bravely down, and succeeded in crushing the intruder, which proved to be a centipede rather smaller than our visitor in the berth. The Captain called this a good illustration of the proverb, 'Grasp your nettle,' and he was right.

When I got on deck, it seemed hotter than below. Awnings were spread, but the pitch was melting out of the seams in any part not fully sheltered. It was the hour, on the west coast of Africa—and indeed on all tropical shores—ever the

most oppressive, when the cool land wind, which blows at night, has died away, and the sea-breeze has not yet set in. Turning landward, the trees and mangrove bushes on the north banks of the Congo, where we had lurked two nights waiting for the Slaver, quivered in the heated air, and the reflection of the sun in the still water, between us and the shore, seemed to burn the eyeballs. I looked to seaward, and at length, far away towards the horizon, saw the glassy smoothness of the water flecked here and there by gentle ripples, the first faint breathings of the wind, 'Cats' paws,' sailors call them. Touches of an angel's wing, I would rather say, the fair angel of health bringing the blessed sea-breeze on her wings.

Although the surface was perfectly smooth, yet there was a long, unbroken swell, under the influence of which the schooner close by was rolling and curtseying gracefully, showing, as she rose from the water, her copper covered with weeds, the results of her long stay up the Congo. Her deck was crowded

with the woolly heads and black skins of the negroes, who were revelling in the unsheltered rays of the sun, which to us would have been death. There was plenty of laughing and fun going on among these happy beings, and I thought, as the sounds came across the water, of the miserable fate which would have been theirs had we not rescued them from slavery.

Near at hand, leaning over the side, the slave-captain was watching his lost ship and her human cargo with very different feelings to mine, if one might judge from the gloomy expression on his dark stern features. I had not seen this man since he fired the pistol-shot which so nearly cost my poor messmate, Forrester, his life. Taller than most Spaniards, he certainly was a fine specimen of a fine race. Just then, his eye meeting mine, he raised his hat, offering me a cheroot, with the courteous greeting of his country :—

‘*Beso usted los maños*’—I kiss your Excellency’s hands.

I returned the salute, but declined the cigar. He replaced his hat, but in doing so the smile of courtesy suddenly left his face. I noticed the cause; his hand had touched a large bruise on his forehead, the impression left by Moore the quartermaster's big fist, on the night of the slaver's capture.

Diego Alvaranja—so he called himself—impatiently pulled the hat down over his brows in a vain attempt to hide the dishonouring spot, and was beginning a little speech expressing his regret that '*el Señor tenente's*' (Forrester's) wound was so severe, when Captain Dentloup, who was walking the quarter-deck, called me to his side.

'You had a hard fight to capture that schooner. Do you think I could trust you to carry her to St Helena ?'

'Oh ! yes, Sir,' I exclaimed, joyfully.

'Well, I believe you can do it. You are well up in your navigation, and you shall have Moore and another steady old petty officer, to look after your

men ; and really, now that Mr Forrester is wounded, I cannot spare a lieutenant.'

The captain now held a confab. with the first lieutenant, and the result was that I received orders to be ready to sail that evening.

We had plenty to do during the day. Six picked men well armed were given me as prize crew, besides the two quarter-masters, Moore, and an Irishman named O'Brien, who had been coxswain of the 'first gig' when the slaver was taken. At the last moment the doctor said that Forrester's wound would heal so much quicker in the fresh breezes of the Atlantic than if he were kept on board the cruiser, that he had better bear us company. The idea of having my old messmate as a companion, although a disabled one, was delightful ; we lifted him, cot and all, carefully into the boat, rowed to the schooner, and laid him down comfortably in one of the sleeping berths (there were two) in the schooner's cabin.

When I got on deck after this, my chest was

being hoisted in from a boat alongside. It was rather a big one, and the first lieutenant often grumbled at it, as being much too large for a midshipman's chest. But I was Captain now, and there was no one to growl as I ordered my own first lieutenant, Moore, to stow it away in the cabin ; which with some difficulty, and after taking off the skylight, was managed.

Then telling Moore to loose sails and shorten-in cable ready for weighing, I pulled back to the *Planet* for my last instructions.

'Now, Murray,' said Captain Dentloup, 'here are your written orders, which, as you will see, are simply "to convey the schooner—name unknown—prize to Her Majesty's ship *Planet*, to St Helena, and deliver her up to the Marshal of the Prize Court for adjudication as a slaver." I have said nothing as to the vessel being a pirate, for although there is little doubt of the fact, it is difficult to prove legally. The slave-captain and two of his crew must go with you, as the Prize Court will

want to examine them. I would not send the Spaniard if it could be avoided, for I don't half like his looks ; it strikes me that if he has a chance of revenging himself he will seize it, so be careful.'

'All right, Sir, I will look after him.'

'Well, mind you do. And now good-bye, and God bless you.'

The 'good old captain shook my hand warmly, and at length I escaped from the hearty farewell grasps of the many friends, men as well as officers, who crowded the gangway. There was a very queer feeling about my eyes as I turned round in the boat for a parting glance at the ship that had been my floating home for the better part of three years, but it all went away as soon as I jumped on the deck of the schooner, *my* schooner now, in one sense.

'Up with the anchor, men, cheerily.'

'Ay, ay, Sir,' answered O'Brien, going forward, while Moore stood by the helm.

Now, our crew was rather a small one, and

although they ‘hove with a will,’ yet after a few turns the windlass stuck fast. I ordered the two Spanish sailors to lend a hand, which they obeyed pleasantly enough. We got another half-turn, but that was all ; the handspikes bent under the men’s hands, but the anchor would not budge.

‘Let me give ’em a song, Sir, merchant-ship fashion, and we will soon get it up,’ said O’Brien.

‘Very well, strike up,—and the quarter-master began an old forecastle ditty ;—

*‘Then up jumped the shark with his five rows of teeth,
Oh ! He jumped up aloft and he shook out a re-ef.’*

‘Now then, chorus, boys, and heave together,

*‘Blow the wind westerly, gentle sou-westerly,
Blow the wind westerly, steady she go-o-oes.’*

With the last words of the chorus, all heaving in time, a good half-turn was gained, the cable was stretched taut as a harp-string. O’Brien continued ;—

*'Then up jumped the whale, the biggest of a-all,
Oh! He jumped up aloft and he let the sail fa-all.
Blow the wind westerly, gentle sou-westerly,
Blow the wind westerly, steady she go-o-oes!'*

Again the men strained—handspikes bent—the windlass creaked,—and at length, with a sudden jerk, the chain cable came rattling in through the hawse-holes, and the reluctant anchor, up-dragged from its miry bed, was run up cheerily to the bows.

By this time it was nearly sunset and the sea-breeze was fast dying away, but enough remained to fill our sails as we passed under the *Planet's* stern. The cruiser's men were in the rigging watching us, but so still and silent were all on board both vessels, that the only sound heard was the gentle ripple at our bows. I lifted my cap to Captain Dentloup, who was looking over the side, and lowered our ensign in respectful farewell. Then the schooner's head was turned as closely as the wind would allow, on the glorious pathway of crimson cast upon the waters by the westering sun.

The last puff of wind left us as the sun sunk

below the horizon, and a dead calm succeeded. I suppose there are few things at sea more unpleasant than a calm ; a regular stiff gale of wind is far more endurable. ‘Jack’ laughs at a gale with a good ship under him, plenty of sea-room, and no fear of a lee-shore. ‘More rain, more rest’ is an old man-of-war adage, and the saying holds good for wind also.

When sail is shortened and the ship made snug, Jack may take his ease in his mess below, or under the lee of the boats, if it should be his watch on deck. There are no drills, which are his abomination —no pipe ‘Clean wood and brass work,’ with which a fidgety first lieutenant tortures his soul.

But in a calm there is no peace. The ship, having no wind to keep her steady, performs the wildest evolutions as the long swell, which always prevails at sea even when the surface is unruffled, rolls her heavily first to starboard, then to port. On deck, masts and yards are creaking and jerking, sails flapping, heavy shot hopping out of the racks, rolling from

side to side, smashing the unlucky fingers and shins of any one trying to stop them, and at last falling down the hatchways to the imminent danger of those below. A broadside gun, too, will sometimes break loose during a heavy lurch, and then, unless the wheels of the gun-carriage be cleverly jammed by hammocks, the heavy mass topples over the hatchways, and starts a plank in the ship's bottom. Down below, the noise and confusion is even greater than on deck, although mingled with more of the ludicrous.

The cabin bulkheads creak and groan, each separate board or partition having its own distinctive and discordant voice. Officers and stewards are in despair as the sound of smash upon smash shows that the mess crockery is getting 'small by degrees and beautifully less ;' while on the lower deck the men, although they try to save their plates and basins, yet think it only fun when they *will* jump off the shelves and be smashed. A sailor can always use his biscuit as a plate, and then, as

he eats it afterwards, the trouble of cleaning up is saved.

We had about two hours of this sort of work in the schooner, and the poor negroes suffered terribly. Captain Dentloup had taken the women and the weakly ones on board the *Planet*; still there were nearly two hundred left, and they lay about the decks helpless and miserable, greatly in the way of our men, who however took it good-humouredly enough, and tried to make the poor creatures eat their supper of rice and calavances.

At length the land-wind, damp and fever-laden from the mangrove swamps of the coast, reached us, the sails filled, the rolling ceased, and the ship's head was laid straight to her course, St Helena being distant—as I had worked out on one of the slaver's own charts spread out on the cabin table—W. S. W. 1200 miles.

'If we get into the South-East trade to-morrow,' I thought, 'we ought to do it in eight days,' and then I walked the weather-side of the quarter-deck,

enjoying the novel feeling of being really in command, and of a ship too that had been won in fair fight. Let my excuse be that I was only a midshipman and sixteen years old. The bright stars of the 'Southern Cross' were high in the heavens, but after two or three years' absence from England one begins to feel home-sick, and to long for the time when this constellation shall disappear, and the well-known form of the 'Great Bear' once more show itself on the northern horizon.

Eight bells (twelve o'clock) struck. O'Brien with three men relieved Moore and his three for the middle watch, and I stopped in my walk, tired enough, to go below. The slave-captain was still on deck, so I spoke to him civilly.

'Señor Capitano, will you not join us in the cabin?'

'No, Señor, *muchos gracias*, it is my custom to sleep on deck—always with your permission.'

Well, it certainly would be highly disagreeable having the fellow in the cabin, but then it was

equally unpleasant to leave him on deck hatching mischief, probably ; and yet I hardly liked to adopt the safer plan of keeping him in irons during the night. I contented myself at last with telling O'Brien to keep his eye upon the captain, and on no account to allow any talking between him and the two other Spanish sailors.

The little cabin, on going below, felt hot and stifling. Forrester was sleeping quietly, but his face looked pale and yellow in the glimmer of the little brass lamp which hung from the deck overhead. The lamp itself was covered with big cock-roaches sucking away at the oil, and as it swung with the ship's motion, an extra jerk now and then dislodged some of these loathly creatures, who fell *tap, tap*, on the table and then crawling to the edge opened their wings and flew up again for another taste of the dainty. It is not nice, killing these pests of the tropics, for the insupportable odour from their bodies renders them worse almost in death than in life. Sailors say too, 'where one

dies two come to his funeral.' The cabin altogether was neither clean nor inviting. I lay down in my clothes, not liking to undress, but slept at last, although for a long time every sound on deck made me start up thinking something was going wrong.

CHAPTER X.

THE SLAVE-CAPTAIN MEANS MISCHIEF.

I WAS on deck early in the morning after our first night in the prize, and found that the breeze off shore had left us after doing its duty and carrying the schooner well to the westward out of sight of land. We had plenty to do all that day, washing decks and cleaning the ship. In two or three hours she began to look decent, although the blood-spots where the dead and wounded had fallen during the fight would not wash out, but had to be scraped clean off.

'White is the glassy deck, without a stain,' I spouted to Forrester when we piped to dinner at 12 o'clock.

'Well, why don't you go on with your quotation,' he replied :—

“ “ Look on that part which sacred doth remain
‘ For the lone chieftain, who majestic stalks
‘ Silent and feared by all—not oft he talks ” ;—

but you *do* talk, and that hop-skip-and-a-jump which you call walking, is anything but majestic, so you make a poor “lone chieftain” after all, Murray. But I will tell you who does look like one, and that is our gloomy friend Don Diego; mind he does not play the part in earnest.’

‘ Oh, I’ll look after the Don. And now, that you may get up your strength to fight him when the time comes, I will just trouble you to eat half this fowl. As for the chieftiancy, why when the return-mail comes out after Captain Dentloup’s despatch, you will be a lieutenant with a pair of epaulettes on your shoulders, and I—poor little middy—shall have to touch my cap and say, “Sir.” ’

‘ Yes, I shall be glad of that. I don’t mean your salute, you egregious—midshipman, you, but the lieutenant’s commission.*

And he went on to tell of a mother and sister in

a Devonshire village who had hitherto pinched themselves to help him. ‘But now,’ he said, ‘it will be hard if I cannot live, when promoted, on a hundred a year, giving them the odd eighty.’

We had a brilliant afternoon this second day of our voyage; a light wind from the south sent us merrily along about four knots an hour. Sky and water were alike ‘deeply, darkly, beautifully blue.’ Shoals of flying fish played round the ship pursued by dolphin and bonita. One rose so high that he came on board, striking the astonished quarter-master at the helm full on the forehead, and then falling, fluttering and helpless, on the deck. We managed to harpoon a dolphin, and with some difficulty got him on board. And there on the forecastle the poor fish lay a-dying, while we standing round watched his lovely colours changing until, as he drew his last gasp, all faded into a cold leaden hue. I pitied him, yet he furnished the men with a good supper, nor was my compassion strong enough to make me refuse my own share, although,

truth to tell, it was horribly dry and tasteless.

Towards evening, the pleasant weather changed, the wind went down, the blue sky became overcast, the clouds thickening in dense dark masses until they seemed almost to touch the mast-heads. Denser still, on the eastern horizon, a dark arch, illumined now and then by flashes of forked lightning, was increasing in size, covering the heavens with a pall. Then we knew the tornado was coming. We shortened all sail, sent the poor frightened slaves below out of harm's way, and awaited its approach.

A few moments of anxious suspense, and the storm, hissing and roaring over the waters, struck the schooner, throwing her, in its first outburst of fury, nearly on her beam ends. With a howl of terror the blacks, thinking the vessel was sinking, struggled on deck. A wave curling over the lee side, which was nearly under water, caught one poor fellow and carried him overboard. I saw his upturned face with imploring eyes, as he floated past,

and seizing a rope, threw it at him. He caught the end, and, one of the men coming to my help, we began to haul in. As we were scarcely making any way through the water, he managed to hold on; gradually we hauled him up, first close astern, then alongside almost within reach of our arms. I leaned over to grasp his hand—touched it. But at the moment the schooner, which had all the while been heeling over so frightfully, suddenly righted, gathered way, and began to scud swiftly before the wind. The unhappy wretch, hope thus snatched away, still held on, and was dragged forcibly in our wake a few yards astern. I watched him with fearful interest. Now a wave, breaking over his face, would cover him, then again his whole form would be visible, ever with both arms over his head grasping the rope. Oh ! it was too horrible. To see a fellow-creature struggling thus against a fearful death—and to be powerless to help ! We dared not attempt to haul in, it would but hasten the end. The strain was already more than he could bear.

In another minute the struggle was over. The rope, torn from his grasp by the increasing speed of the ship, came 'home' in our hands, and the poor negro—slave no longer—his dying cry borne away by the fury of the storm unheard, save by Him who is the Father of all his creatures, black or white—

'Sank into the depths with bubbling groan,
'Without a grave, unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown.'

I turned my eyes from the spot where the poor fellow had disappeared, but the picture, which a flash of lightning made distinct, of those two hands upstretched in despairing supplication as he sank, rests for ever in my memory.

At the time, though, all thoughts of the drowned man were soon effaced by our labours for the safety of the vessel. The tornado, as its violence swelled, brought on a heavy chopping sea. Moore and O'Brien took the helm, but the schooner steered so wildly as she drove before the wind, that with all their care they could scarcely prevent her from

'broaching-to' in the trough of the sea. Then the decks were so low that as we watched the big waves in our wake, tossing and foaming as they chased us, rearing their curling crests above our heads, it seemed at times as if they *must* break over the stern and swamp the little craft.

Meanwhile the slaves, who had rushed on deck in their sudden fright, were got below again, the hatchways and cabin skylight safely covered and battened down. Not a bit too soon were those precautions taken, for looking astern I now saw a wave approaching which it seemed impossible we should escape.

'Secure yourselves, men,' I shouted, clinging to the rigging.

The wave broke. The boat hanging near the stern was smashed to atoms, the very rails snapping like sticks. The sheerer suggestion induced a mass of water that rolled along the deck and rising high above the hatchways carried up and over every moveable thing. But the gallant little crew stood fast again as the water passed them not once.

through the scupper-holes, and the danger was over.

In another hour the tornado had spent its force, subsiding into a steady gale from the south-east. This enabled us to carry some sail, and to keep our course. I stopped on deck until an hour before midnight, and then went below, leaving O'Brien and his watch of three men in charge.

'I say, take off the skylight,' said Forrester as I came into the cabin ; 'we shall be smothered before morning.'

'Well, just as you like,' I meekly rejoined. 'Only for my part I prefer the chance of being smothered to the certainty of being drowned.'

We compromised the matter, by leaving the door at the foot of the companion ladder open ; and then regularly tired out with the day's work, I threw myself without undressing on the bed.

Half-an-hour may have passed when some sudden noise woke me, and I started up. Forrester was also sitting up in bed, although I could scarcely distinguish the outline of his figure, the lamp hav-

ing gone out. We listened. There was a heavy fall, and then the sound of something being dragged along the deck over our heads. I jumped up, ran to the door—it was shut.

‘Why, Forrester, have you shut the door?’

‘No, indeed, the rolling of the ship must have done it.’

I turned the handle, but the door was locked from the outside, nor with all my pushing and straining could I make it move.

‘There is foul play in this,’ I exclaimed at last, ‘and the Spaniard must be at the bottom of it. Oh Forrester! how I wish I had taken your advice, and kept that man in irons. If any of our poor fellows have lost their lives through my leniency, I am everlastingly disgraced.’

But my brave old messmate soon cheered me up. ‘Come, there will be time enough to talk when there’s no work to be done. Just now what we have to do is to find some way out of this cabin, where we have been caught like rats in a trap.

You used to have a small box of tools in the *Planet*, I only wish they were in the schooner.'

'But they *are* in the schooner, and in this chest too,' I joyfully exclaimed; and lifting the lid I groped about in the dark until the box was found, and in the box priceless treasures in the way of chisels, fine steel saws, and all manner of tools. Forrester seemed to forget all about his wound, and we worked away at the door, stopping now and then in fear lest the sound should betray us, but the gale had not quite gone down, and there was noise enough on deck to cover what we were making. At length there was a hole big enough for my hand. I passed it through, found the key all right in the lock outside, turned it gently, and the door opened.

'Now then, for a reconnoitre,'—I put one foot on the cabin stairs, but in doing so, to my infinite disgust, knocked my head against the hatchway cover, which being fastened down effectually prevented any getting on deck in that direction.

Baffled by this precaution of the Spaniards we sat down on the lower step and cast about for other means of escape. The skylight was hopeless, as we knew too well from the care taken to secure it during the tornado. How about the stern windows? There were no real windows, the vessel was too small to have them with safety, but we found their places were supplied by thin shutters or deadlights, painted outside, no doubt in imitation of panes of glass.'

'It strikes me,' said Forrester, 'that if we can take out that middle deadlight, your lengthy body might manage to creep out. There's no room to spare, but luckily midshipman's fare in the *Planet* has not fattened you up overmuch.'

'But how if we ship a sea through the hole?'

'Well, we must risk that, but we will take the board out in one piece, and be ready to nail it on again in a moment; one sea won't swamp us.'

With a thin, pointed steel saw apiece, we soon worked round the shutter until it was held by one

corner only. Then I carefully reloaded my pistol, one of the large, old-fashioned, navy-pattern, with heavy brass-bound handle, placed it in my breast, and grasped Forrester's hand — 'Good-bye, old fellow—'

'Better not *do* anything yet, Murray, only look round, and then come back and consult with me.'

'All right.' But inwardly my resolve was made, if once I gained the deck, never to leave it except as its master.

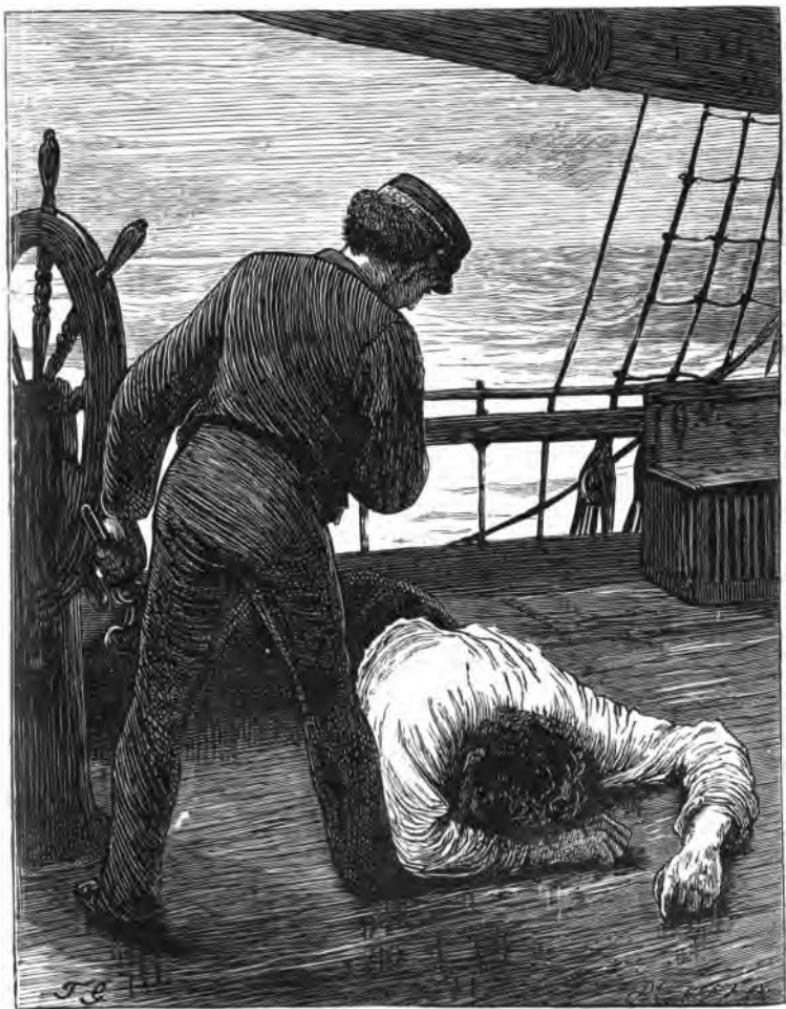
Then we broke off the piece of wood entirely ; but the sea without looked so wild and so dangerously on a level with the opening, that I begged Forrester to fasten the deadlight up again the minute my legs should be through. Even as we spoke the top of a wave dashed in, and flooded the cabin. Before a second one could follow, my head and shoulders were outside. It was a tight fit, but at last my arms were free. It was a lucky chance that the stern boat had been washed away in the gale, otherwise it would have been hanging over-

head right in the way, but now I was able, turning round and facing forward, to take hold of the taffrail with both hands. Then disengaging my feet from the opening, and twisting my legs round the boat's 'falls,' which were left dangling, I raised my head slowly until I was high enough to look over the stern along the schooner's deck.

It was nearly full moon, so the night, though cloudy, was not dark. I could make out some one standing by the tiller, steering. Not O'Brien, certainly—too tall for him. No! but as certainly the slave-captain, Don Diego. I could see no other persons on deck, although there might be some in the bows where it was darker. Now was the time to take the enemy by surprise. I dragged myself up very cautiously, inch by inch, watching him all the while—for if he turned his head all was lost—until at last I was fairly over the taffrail and crouching down still undiscovered on the deck. Something like a bundle of clothes was lying huddled up close by. I looked at it more attentively. It was the

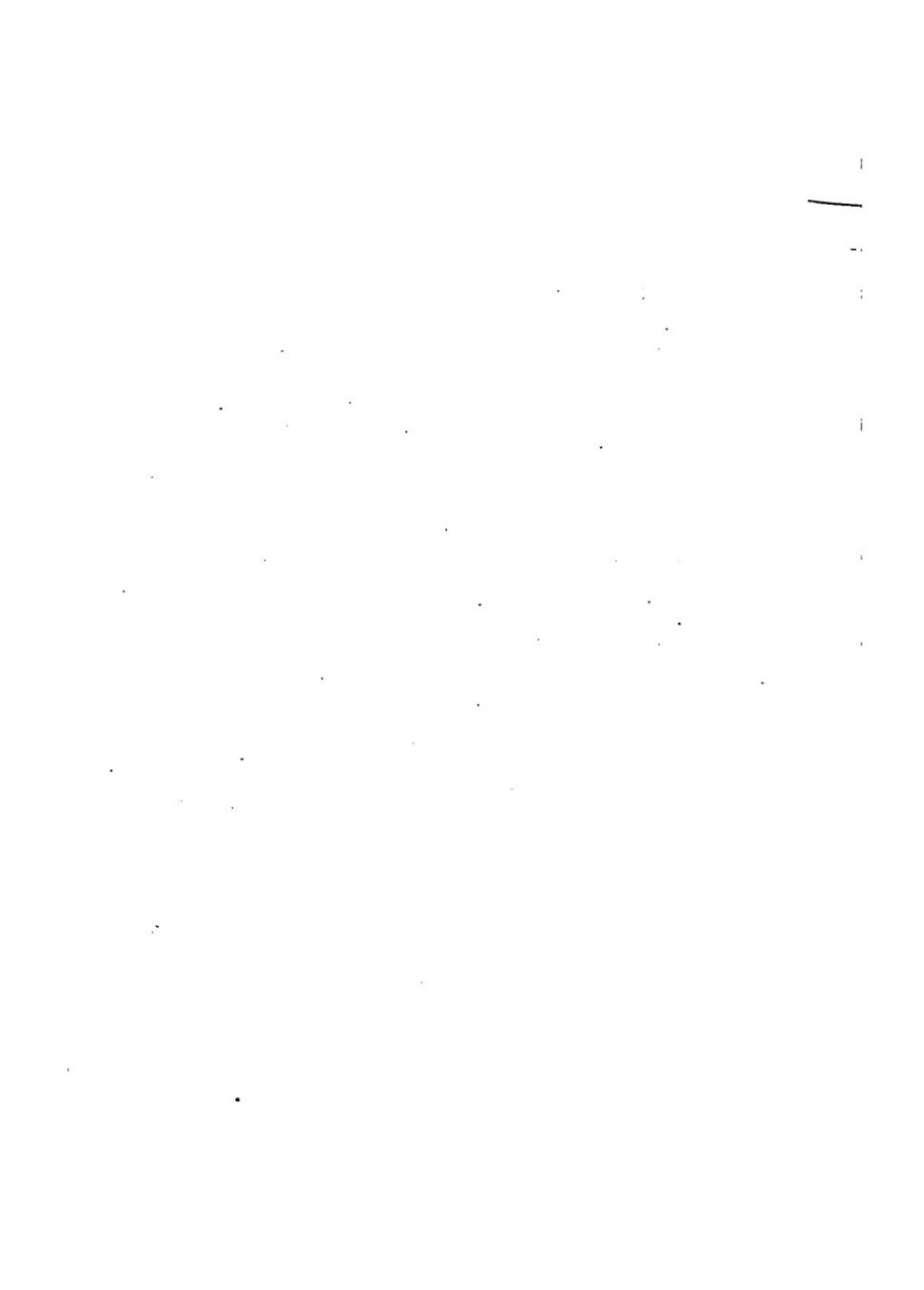
poor Irish quarter-master—murdered, no doubt. The sight roused me into intense anger ; I jumped up—forgot all caution—seized the pistol by the barrel, and sprang at the Spaniard. He turned round—saw me—put his hand quickly inside his breast—but before he could withdraw it, I had brought the butt-end down with all my force full upon his forehead. His head bent forward upon his breast. Then with one staggering step he fell without a groan, face forward on the deck.

Scarce was the captain down, when, disturbed by the noise, the two other Spaniards came running aft. I did not care much for these fellows, so pointing the pistol, ordered them to stand ; and the cravens at once threw down their knives and cried, '*Misericorde ! Señor.*' Then I told them to go forward and uncover the hatchway, at which all this time a tremendous thumping had been going on from below. They obeyed, but when the hatch was about half unfastened, it was pushed up suddenly, capsizing the Spaniards, who were kneeling



'HE FELL FACE FORWARD ON THE DECK.'

Page 136.



The Slave Captain W.C. Moore

out in their work—Moore, with the
imprisoned men, rushed on deck, and the
was my own again.

Now these men, down with us
and nail up the deadgong. "We
swallowed

And now I was sent to
all about and forward to
to keep our ship in
was full to ~~the brim~~
their last ~~breath~~
as soon as ~~they~~
the dear ~~lives~~

When he
of poor ~~lives~~
and with ~~the~~
beating ~~lungs~~
from ~~loss~~
he had ~~been~~
be fatal at ~~the~~
shoulder

ugly, was not dangerous. As soon as the quarter-master was able to speak he told the story of the attempt at recapture. How the three men in his watch, thinking all was safe, had gone below for a smoke ; how the slave-captain was looking over the stern, and O'Brien, careless and unsuspecting, was taking no heed of his movements, when suddenly he felt a blow on his back :—

‘ I turned round and saw the murdering villain’s face close to me, and after that I don’t remember anything at all, sir.’

Evidently as soon as O’Brien was disposed of, the cabin hatchway and the one forward had been fastened over our heads. It was a cleverly contrived scheme, but could not have been carried out but for the carelessness of the watch on deck. However, ‘ all’s well that ends well,’ nobody was killed, and after roundly scolding the men, I made them all happy by promising not to report them on our return to the *Planet*.

Señor Diego now began to move. I was glad the

blow had only stunned, not killed him, but felt a horrible repugnance towards the man when Moore pulled out of his breast a clasp knife made dagger fashion, with a catch to secure the blade when open. It was yet moist with O'Brien's blood, and would have been dyed with mine had I been less quick in my attack.

'Put him in irons, Moore, and his two men with him ;' and in irons we kept him until the voyage was ended.

We were able to let the poor blacks have some fresh air now, as wind and sea were both going down. The rest of the night I walked the deck. Well, I say I walked, but I believe that during the last hour, although my legs went on marching up and down, *myself* was really fast asleep.

The morning rose bright and glorious after the stormy and eventful night. The trade wind blew steadily and stayed by us for the remainder of the passage. We had no more adventures, nor did we want any. So we sailed, until at sunset of the eighth

day the lonely rock of St Helena rose before us in mid-ocean. I kept as close in as I dared during the night, and, when daylight broke, steered for the anchorage, which the chart showed we should find off Jamestown.

Mile after mile we coasted along, nothing before us but a lofty wall of rock with the surf dashing at its foot—not an inlet of any sort or a patch of beach where a boat might attempt a landing—until on rounding a point our delighted eyes suddenly rested on a spot where the rocks, dividing, formed a ravine broad towards the sea, narrowing as it went up inland. The banks of the ravine were studded with houses and gardens ranged on each side of a street, and above the roofs rose a church spire. To us, who for nearly three years had seen nothing but palm-trees and mangrove swamps, the place seemed like a half-way house to England.

The anchor was dropped, and in a few hours white prisoners and black freemen were safely landed. Then I was free to 'have a ride'—the

darling wish of every imdshipman directly he gets on shore—and mounting a horse I galloped off towards the tomb where for so many years rested the bones of the great Napoleon.

CHAPTER XI.

A CONJUNCTION WITH TAURUS.

A PLEASANTER place for a midshipman, after cruising for two or three years on the west coast of Africa, than St Helena, it would be difficult to find.

Such was my feeling when, released from the cares of my first command, I was able to enjoy at once the delicious freedom from the restraints of a man-of-war, and the fresh Atlantic breezes, which carried away all lingering traces of yellow fever engendered in the rivers and mangrove swamps of the coast.

Hospitality towards naval officers is a cardinal virtue in every colony where the flag of England floats, exercised alike by planters in the West

Indies, or 'warm-hearted merchants at St Helena. I was seated at breakfast in the hotel the second morning of our arrival, with Forrester my friend and messmate, when a gentleman called, scouted the idea of our remaining there, and conducted us forthwith to his hospitable mansion; placing his possessions, horses, carriages and all, at our disposal.

Nor was this offer made with the meaningless courtesy of the Spaniard, who, when you praise his horse, replies, bowing gravely, '*à la disposition de usted*'—'It is yours, sir,' but it was real and intended to be accepted.

The carriage we rather scorned, as being effeminate as well as unsuited to the ups and downs of what in St Helena pass for roads. But the rides! How we did scamper over the country, and how thankful the horses must have been when we left. It requires many years' experience to teach a midshipman that a horse can possibly have any paces save two—a walk and a full gallop—and that ex-

perience had not yet reached us. However, the walks were numerous, for the roads were steep; and the gallops short, for the gates were many, bringing us up when least expected.

Approaching St Helena by sea—well, you cannot approach it any other way—the high wall of rock encircling the island gives no promise of cultivated ground in the interior. The surprise, therefore, is the more agreeable when, on gaining the summit of the steep hill leading out of Jamestown, you find yourself in a pleasant country with occasional trees, houses, and well-wooded valleys. In one of the pleasantest of these vales, the willow still shadows the empty grave of Napoleon. Like all visitors to the spot, we gathered the leaves, but any sentimental value they may have had vanished when we heard that the original tree had perished years ago, those now standing being but apocryphal descendants. But, in truth, a more lovely retired spot for a last resting-place could not be chosen by prince or peer.

Tropical fruits were plentiful enough. In our host's garden the ripe clusters of grapes wooed us so closely and lovingly from the trellis, that no hands needed to be raised to pluck them ; when resting in the shady bower during the heat of the day, you had but to open your lips and you sucked them gently in without trouble. But more refreshing to taste and eye of us exiles from England than even luscious grape or cooling melon was the homely blackberry, which, to our surprise and delight, we found growing in profusion all over the island, recalling, as we gathered the fruit, memories of old school-boy days and Saturday half-holidays.

Then in the evenings all the houses in Jamestown were open to the midshipmen ; and after being shut up for two years and a half in a ten-gun brig, it was no light pleasure—not to dwell in marble halls, we didn't want that, but—to tread carpeted rooms, to hear the sound of the piano, and to listen to the soft tones of fair girls instead of receiving gruff orders from first lieutenants and

officers of the watch. We were lions, too, in a small way, or rather lion cubs, for the story of the Spanish captain and his attempt to re-capture the prize had got about. In fact, as Forrester observed, one afternoon,—

‘Murray, we are living in clover, only this lazy life is terribly demoralizing ; I don’t seem to care if I never see the midshipmen’s berth in the *Planet* again.’

‘You are not the first weary mariner who has felt that,’ I replied. ‘Listen—

“Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar ;
Oh rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.”’

‘Ah, that is very nice ; please go on, it makes one feel so deliciously drowsy.’

But I declined sending him to sleep with the song of the Lotos-eaters, and, much against Forrester’s will, roused him up, and made him get ready for a ride.

Of course now-a-days society at St Helena will

bear comparison with that of any English possession, but at that time stories were still whispered showing the sweet simplicity of the inhabitants in the old war-time, when the island was merely a place of refreshment for the Company's ships returning from India. A legend was current how one young lady inquired of an officer with whom she was dancing whether 'England was not very dull when the China fleet had sailed?' And another, cognisant only of the rocky shores of her own island, wanted to know whether there was 'more than one landing-place in England?'

Among our fellow-guests was a lieutenant named Vincent, who like myself had arrived in charge of a prize. This temporary messmate bore his part well in all our pursuits and enjoyments save one—he never rode. The satisfactory reason being, that he wore a wooden leg.

One evening, after much pressing, Vincent consented to tell the story of the lost limb.

'I don't talk much about it,' said he, 'because I

think it is rather hard lines for a naval man to lose his leg any way but in action ; but this is how it happened :—

‘ Gibraltar was at its gayest and hottest, gay beyond precedent, because a princess of the Spanish blood-royal had deigned to visit the fortress—hotter than usual for the sufficient reason that it was the month of August ; and if you have discovered in your wanderings any place in or out of the tropics, hotter than Gibraltar during that month, I can only say that your experience differs from mine.

‘ The Duke and Duchess of Montpensier were honoured guests of the Governor at “ The Convent,” and the usual routine of balls, dinners, reviews of troops in the Neutral ground, and a picnic—no, royal personages do not picnic—a “ déjeûner ” in the cork wood, had been faithfully accomplished. His Royal Highness had been duly conducted over the forts, through all the wonderful network of passages and casemates, and in accordance with the excessively open-handed English custom of our

authorities on the like occasions, permitted with his suite to note every strong and weak point of the fortress.'

'The only denizens of Gibraltar who scorned to pay attention to the distinguished visitors, and who resolutely refused to attend the levées, or even to be seen on the Alaméda—although at other times their tailless forms were frequently visible amongst the trees—were the apes. Possibly they had retreated down the cave and through the legendary passage under the Straits to the old homes of their fore-fathers in the Barbary mountains. Anyhow, it was felt as a grievance. The apes had always been granted brevet rank as lions, and why could they not show themselves when wanted ?

'One object of interest yet remained unseen—the cave I have mentioned, the inmost recesses of which were to be explored on the last day of the royal visit. Sappers and miners were in readiness with ladders to assist in the various descents, torches and candles, blue-lights and port-fires innumerable

were provided, and in the glowing words of Dashwood, the aide-de-camp in special charge of these proceedings :—

“ The whole would conclude with a magnificent display of fireworks, illuminating with terrific glare yet tender radiance the cavernous depths and Titanic proportions of this awe-inspiring marvel of nature, and forming a scene unsurpassed in the habitable or uninhabitable globe.”

‘ Due honours having been paid to this great lion of the Rock, a farewell dinner at “ The Convent,” followed by a ball, would end the festivities ; and early the next morning the Royal guests were to depart under a final salute, leaving His Excellency the Governor and all the dignitaries, civil and military—whom the perpetual excitement and hot sun of the last week had well-nigh killed—to their hard-earned repose.

‘ In those days tunics were unknown : the army was still resplendent in the glory of coats surmounted by glittering epaulettes, a distinction now con-

fined to the service afloat. Rumour avers that the Admiralty tailor did once receive orders to prepare a pattern tunic for the navy ; and that on the garment being completed, *Sartor* appeared as a lay figure to show off its graces. Happily the dress looked so utterly unsuited for sailors that the idea was at once abandoned.

' During these gaieties, two blue uniforms were to be seen intermingled with the more brilliant scarlet : one worn by Lieutenant Constant, commanding Her Majesty's Ship *Orestes* ; the other owned by myself, a junior officer of the same ship, and by my rank entitled to one epaulette only. That unhappy single epaulette ! Well do I remember the awkward, one-sided appearance it gave to an officer, conveying to lookers-on the irresistible idea that its fellow had fallen off, casting also an evil spell on the wearer's eyes—compelling them to glance so continually in its direction, that, in naval phraseology, a "kink in the neck" was the result.

' The *Orestes* was but a small craft with an auxili-

ary screw, carrying four guns and eighty men ; and one young midshipman and the assistant-surgeon were my only messmates in the gun-room. Very pleasant days we spent at Gibraltar, varied by an occasional trip to Tangiers, or an ineffectual cruise up the Mediterranean in search of the Rif pirates who infest the coast of Morocco ; and who, in fact, had within the last week audaciously plundered an unlucky English merchant-vessel which during a calm had drifted too close in shore.

'We were moored inside the New Mole, not two ship's lengths from the shore, and on this hot afternoon, as the smoke from our cigars curled upwards in the still air, while we leaned over the side lazily watching the government convicts lazily working, it was decided that the glories of the cave, even if equalling Dashwood's glowing description, could not weigh in the scale against the fatigue of the ascent. "No," said Constant, "I shall stay on board until it is time for the ball ; and then tomorrow, when the Duchess has departed, we will be

off for a cruise after the Moorish rascals who boarded that brig." The small midshipman, at this moment, crept up, touching his cap, with his hesitating, "Please, sir, may I go to the ball?" A permission which was graciously accorded.

'The ball passed off well, although perhaps the presence of royalty infused a little more quietness —may I say even flatness?—than is generally observable at colonial entertainments, where society is necessarily of a mixed character, so much so that on pursuing your investigations into the social status of "that nice girl" with whom you have just danced, you will probably discover that her papa is the gentleman who sold you the eau de Cologne and box of regalias across his counter that morning. The endless "Sir Roger de Coverley" having at last come to an end, we naval men walked towards our boat in high spirits, little dreaming that one of the three had that night danced his last dance, and that for him henceforth balls should be "never more."

'The echoes of the salute to departing royalty the

next day had scarce died away, and the smoke from the guns was still hanging around the grim fortress rock, when our anchor was up, and the *Orestes* under all sail rounding Europa Point. A westerly wind, fresh and glorious, made steam unnecessary, we drew in new life with the breeze which curled the blue waters of the Mediterranean, and with hearts as buoyant as the good old ship herself we began our cruise.

'Much to be desired is the life of a naval officer on this station ; he enjoys the luxury of yachting without its expense, and his daily routine of duty wards off the tedium and sameness complained of by landsmen who spend many consecutive days at sea. Thus the time passed until the day following our departure from Gibraltar, when we sighted that portion of the northern part of Barbary which bears the name of the Riff Coast. Getting steam up, we narrowly inspected every inlet of the rocky shore, coasting along slowly in hopes of discovering traces of the Moorish plunderers; but not a

vestige of the pirates, men or boats, could be seen ; not a lateen-sail dotted the surface of the bay. Disappointed, we proceeded onwards towards the Spanish fortress of Melilla, and anchored there for the night.

‘ Shortly after breakfast the next morning the captain’s gig was manned, and Constant, taking me with him, left the ship in order to pay the due official visit to the Governor. We soon reached the shore, and on landing were received by an aide-de-camp and other officers with the usual politeness and high-bred courtesy of the Spaniard. One accomplishment the Spanish officers possessed in common with ourselves—a smattering of bad French—conversation on both sides being greatly aided by explanatory gestures. Accepting gladly an invitation to walk round the place and inspect the fortifications, we followed our new friends up the steep ascent leading from the sea-gate.

‘ The Spanish flag flying at Melilla is hated as much by the Moors as the English ensign which

floats over Gibraltar is detested by the Spaniards, and many unsuccessful attempts have been made to drive the Christian invaders into the sea. At the present time there was peace between the two nations ; but nevertheless no wandering son of the desert passed within sight of the fort without feeling it his duty to conceal himself behind a sand hillock and take a "pot-shot" from his long barrel at any infidel head which might be visible above the walls, a proceeding that naturally caused a bright look-out to be kept by the Spaniards on the land side.

We noticed that the sentry on the most exposed post was provided with a telescope to enable him to sweep the horizon in search of these lurking foes. As we came up, the officers asked this soldier if any Moors were then in sight ; he replied in the negative ; we turned away, and were passing on, when a puff of white smoke on the desert shore attracted our attention ; at the same moment the sentry fell heavily to the ground, dead, with a ball

through his brain. His slayer was visible, running with wonderful quickness inland, and was soon out of reach of the hasty and ill-directed fire of musketry which his daring act drew from the garrison.

'Saddened by this occurrence we left the spot and came next to a large open "plaza" in front of the barracks and the Governor's house. Here was collected a crowd of soldiers round a magnificent black bull, which had been brought in that morning by the Moors, and was now waiting an opportunity of conveyance to Spain, to become the monarch of the arena at the approaching bull-fights at Madrid. Joining the group, we gazed with admiration on the perfect proportions of the noble brute, as with vast strength he pulled and strained at the thick ropes that bound him to an iron ring fastened deep in the ground. The presence of so many spectators excited him to redoubled fury, and it was impossible to think, without a thrill, of the consequences should the cords at length give way.

'Scarcely had the idea time to form itself in our

minds before we saw it realized. With the ineffectual and broken fastenings hanging about his neck, the bull stood confronting his enemies, in entire liberty. Uttering cries of "*Guarda el toro!*!" the spectators recoiled, seeking safety in flight, leaving Constant and myself standing close to the infuriated animal, who now, with a loud bellow, charged full upon us. Our only arms were uniform swords, utterly useless in such a conflict, and—well, I may as well confess it at once and without shame—we both fairly turned tail and ran; other chance of escape for the moment there was none. One side of the plaza was open to the sea, and observing a rocky projection, I made for it with the view of placing the rock between me and my pursuer; but, just before reaching the goal, my foot caught in some crevice of the uneven ground, and with a heavy crash I fell prostrate.

'Bruised and shattered by the fall, I lay unable to rise even had there been time, but time there was none. Before me was a precipitous descent, at the

foot of which the waves were dashing, and behind —close at hand—a foe relentless and hard as the very rock itself.

‘Happily my presence of mind was fully retained, and I resolved to sell life dearly. On came the bull with rushing steps ; lessening his speed a moment, he lowered his head and charged directly at me. I contrived to turn round and front him ; I felt his hot breath in my face ; in another moment his horns would be buried in my side ; when, as by sudden inspiration, I saw a chance of escape. Stretching out my arms as he charged, I caught his horns, one in each hand, and thus, with the superhuman strength given by imminent danger, held the animal in my grip. Snorting and bellowing, the furious brute strove to shake off the grasp ; with a sudden wrench he tossed his head high in the air, lifting me with him until my feet scarce touched the ground. Twice he did this, the second time throwing me violently to earth, yet still I held on. For some minutes the fearful struggle lasted ;

face to face I wrestled with my enemy, half-blinded with the foam thrown off from his burning mouth, and my own sweat. I was beginning to feel that my power of endurance was lessening and strength failing, when at length I heard the welcome clatter of accoutrements and the sound of many running feet. The Spanish soldiers came up, led by Constant, half a dozen muskets were discharged,—the bull staggered, and fell dead at my feet.

Exhausted though triumphant, I attempted to rise, but without success; and discovered for the first time that I had not escaped unwounded from the fight, one of my legs being severely fractured and covered with blood. A party of men speedily carried me to the Governor's residence, and all requisite immediate attention having been paid by the army surgeons, Constant had me conveyed carefully on board, and we steamed away for Gibraltar.

'Of the subsequent months spent in sick-quarters at the Rock—of the amputation eventually endured

—I need not speak. The tedium of a lengthened convalescence was softened and rendered easy by the unwearying kindness of many warm-hearted friends. The Admiralty granted me promotion (the second epaulette) as a solace for my loss, and a wooden leg, which had remained in store at Gibraltar since the days of Trafalgar. Other wooden legs have I used and worn out since then, but the original worm-eaten one I still keep as a memento of that hot summer's day in the Mediterranean, when I "took the bull by the horns."

'And that was the way,' concluded the lieutenant, as he took his candle and stumped off to bed, 'that I became a "monopod."'

CHAPTER XII.

FORRESTER BECOMES SENTIMENTAL.

SIX weeks glided away very happily, and we began almost to forget that we were borne on the books of one of Her Majesty's ships, when one morning after breakfast, while the horses were waiting outside for the usual ride, our host called out,—

‘There is the signal for a man-of-war flying from Ladder Hill.’

We looked rather blank at this intelligence, for even if the new arrival proved not to be the *Planet*, yet whatever the vessel, we should have to take a passage in her back to the coast. Sadly we ordered the horses round to the stables, and decided on walking to the signal station.

Now this post was situated at the top of a hill overlooking the sea in all directions, and could be reached in two ways, either by a good road which gradually wound round to the top, or by a series of ladders placed on the steep scarped face of the hill. Being in a hurry, of course we chose the latter means of ascent, and regretted it when too late. The ladders were popularly supposed to consist of three hundred and sixty-five steps—a favourite number among the ignorant; in like manner the uncounted islands of Bermuda are imagined to equal the number of days in the year.

The first few dozen steps were mounted gallantly, then we slackened speed, and then Forrester called a halt. Looking at the enormous length of the ladders yet above our heads, and the little distance gained, I meekly suggested the propriety of descending and walking up the ordinary road; but Forrester scorned the idea of giving in, so on we went, and after a second interval of rest gained a platform which marked the half-way distance. So

much being gained we determined to finish the task, but it was horrid work ; the sun beat fiercely on our heads, and white jackets and trousers were wringing wet when, after many halts, we at length drew our aching limbs over the last and highest step, and threw ourselves exhausted on the grass.

The non-commissioned officer in charge of the signal station brought wine and water, and entertained us with stories how persons landing from ships after a long voyage had attempted the ladder, and being unused to exercise had stopped short in the middle, unable to go a step further either up or down, and in imminent danger of falling, until they were at length rescued from their unpleasant position by means of ropes. Stories which we could well believe.

We looked out to seaward. Yes, there was the man-of-war brig standing in for the anchorage with all sail set ; and Forrester, after a long gaze through the signal-man's glass, exclaimed in a dolorous

tone as he passed it to me, ‘That is the *Planet*, Murray, worse luck !’

Looking down from our great height through the glass, I could even make out Captain Dentloup’s figure standing on the quarter-deck, and our hearts soon warmed towards the cruiser as she sailed gracefully on, a perfect picture of beauty and strength—as were all our war-ships in those days when as yet iron-clad monsters were unknown.

We walked slowly down the road—quickly, we could not—took a boat, and got on board just as the anchor dropped. How yellow and bilious every one looked in the brig ; and on the other hand how they congratulated us on our healthy sunburnt faces. Captain Dentloup listened rather gravely to the story of my adventures in the prize, and when it was ended, said,—

‘Well, as I suppose you are not likely to let a Spanish captain catch you asleep again, I will say no more on that head ; and now I have our good news to tell you : the *Planet* is ordered to England

and we shall sail in a few days, but I intend to cruise along the coast on our way home. Now, you can rejoin your messmates.'

The berth certainly *did* look small and comfortless after our quarters on shore, but the warm greeting of old friends made up for all ; and Forrester, despite his doubts, seemed perfectly contented, and was already eating salt junk for luncheon with infinite relish. One thing, however, we could not stand, and that was the weevily biscuit out of which the insects dropped by hundreds when we tapped it on the table. For this food our shore living had quite spoiled us, but it mattered the less, as a fresh supply of new biscuit would be taken in before sailing.

A week's run on shore did wonders for the crew of the *Planet*, and their sickly-looking faces improved immensely. Then we said 'good-bye' to our friends all over the island, the anchor was weighed and the brig stood out to sea. Many were the songs that evening on the forecastle and in the mid-

shipmen's berth, but they all told one tale ; no song had a chance unless each verse ended with a chorus such as,—

'For we are homeward bound, my boys, we are homeward bound.'

Forrester was missing from all this conviviality. I went on deck and found him, cigar in mouth, leaning over the stern with eyes fixed on the island, now a mere rock on the horizon. Guessing the subject of his thoughts, for he had the last week imagined himself deeply in love with a fair islander, named, in memory of Napoleon's first wife, Josephine, I pressed his shoulder, exclaiming,—

'Why, Forrester, you are looking the wrong way, England lies over the bows.'

He started, dropping his cigar into the water.
'Now, Murray, what a nuisance you are ! you have driven a lovely thought clean out of my head ; I have been composing.'

'Composing ! oh, I know, composing yourself to sleep. Yes, that is an old habit of yours.'

'No, composing poetry, irreverent midshipman.

And if you had the least spark of sentiment about you I wouldn't mind giving you a verse or two.'

'Oh, don't spare my feelings, I beg, I can do a great deal to oblige a friend—can even listen to his verses if they are not *very* bad. Heave ahead.'

Forrester began,—

‘In the midnight hour, when all but me
Are buried in profoundest sleep,
And in the ship, the sky, the sea,
No sound disturbs the silence deep,
An angel hovers o'er the scene
And whispers soft—Forget not Josephine.’

‘But what are you looking at aloft?’

‘Oh, nothing,’ I replied ; ‘only trying to make out this angel. Can’t see her. Quarter-master, lend me your glass.’

‘Now, be quiet, Murray, or you sha’n’t have the next verse.’ But he brought it out nevertheless.

‘They tell thee that the salt sea spray
Thrown o’er us by the wind’s rude blast
Soon drives our vows of love away,
And memory to the waves is cast ;
Believe them not—the water’s brightest sheen
But calls to mind the eyes of Josephine.’

'Sorry poor memory should become so sea-sick,
I said, and rushed below—for Forrester had caught
up a rope's end which lay temptingly near to his
hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUR LAST PRIZE.

WE had a pleasant passage back to the coast, and on the tenth day reached our old cruising ground off the mouth of the Congo. As soon as we had come to an anchor near Shark's Point, I was sent away in charge of a well-armed boat's crew, and pulled inside Pirates' Creek, and then some distance up the mighty river, searching each gloomy and mangrove-bordered inlet as we passed, in hopes of coming unaware upon some slaver lying concealed. But no rakish schooner or wicked-looking felucca with black hull lying low in the water, gladdened our eyes, and we returned to the ship tired with our bootless quest.

Next morning, as soon as the sea breeze set in,

we got under weigh and spanked along merrily, with the ship's head pointing due north, to the great delight of the men, who declared that at last the wives and sweethearts at Portsmouth had 'got hold of the tow-rope.' Then, too, we had been so long under southern skies, that when we crossed the line and were once more in north latitude, it seemed a great step towards home, and the day was kept as a regular jubilee, although we were far too old cruisers to be visited by Neptune and his myrmidons.

It was my second 'dog watch' on deck that evening—from six to eight—and we were eight or nine miles off shore, not far from the mouth of the river Gaboon ; the wind had sunk and the weather was misty, so that as nothing could be seen from aloft, the look-out had been called down from the mast-head. Standing on the top-gallant forecastle, and looking round just as eight bells was about to strike and end my watch, I fancied there was something like a sail right ahead, and pointed my glass in that

direction; but either my eyes were deceived or else the object had vanished behind the white veil of mist, for nothing could be made out, and my relief coming up shortly afterwards, I went below.

Forrester was in the berth reading, and Gilbert the assistant-surgeon was busy examining some hideous specimens of centipedes, snakes, scorpions, and other pleasant denizens of the coast. Both my messmates were evidently much worried and bothered by big cockroaches which were flying about the room, according to their agreeable custom in hot steamy evenings. Gilbert, as I entered, threw away with a shudder one of these horrible creatures which had got entangled in his hair, and asked me the news from deck.

' How many knots are we making, Murray? I don't think you have done much in your watch towards bringing us nearer home—to that dear England where the lively cockroach no longer soars aloft in mid-air, but retiring from public gaze

under the modest title of black-beetle, passes a life of dignified ease in its native kitchen.'

'No, I am sorry to say it is almost a calm, but we shall have the land wind soon. What a hurry you are in to get home and spend your prize money!'

'Ah,' said Forrester, 'Gilbert is quite insensible to the honour and glory of belonging to a ship which has made more prizes than any cruiser ever known, except the *Styx* and the *Waterwitch*. I remember the latter vessel sending the last slaver she captured into Sierra Leone with a flag flying marked "W. W. 37."'

'Do you recollect,' inquired Gilbert, 'our first prize, the unfortunate Spanish brig *Dolorida*? I am always puzzled to know how she could be lost and leave nothing behind to tell the story of her fate.'

'There is the breeze at last,' cried Forrester, as the ship heeled over a little and the water began to gurgle by. 'And what is that pipe?'

The pipe was 'Watch make sail;' about the

most welcome one that can be heard on board a cruiser, and the midshipmen's berth was cleared in a moment.

The mist had lifted, giving place to a clear starlight sky, and on our starboard bow, within gunshot, a large brig under a press of canvas was standing in close-hauled for the shore. We had been jogging along quietly under topsails and top-gallant sails waiting for the breeze, but courses and royals were now set ; and then I went on the forecastle, where Captain Dentloup was giving orders to clear away a gun.

'She *may* be an honest trader, making for the Gaboon, and if so she will heave to without any fuss, so don't put any shot in it, Mr Andrews, although I am much mistaken if those taunt masts belong either to a Bristol or a Liverpool palm-oil trader.'

The flash from our foremost gun lighted up the decks, and as the smoke curled away to leeward, we kept our eyes fixed anxiously on the strange sail.

The captain, after a long gaze through his night glass, turned round to the first lieutenant in high spirits:—

‘Beat to quarters, if you please, and give her a shot as soon as you like; there is no surrender in that craft, and she is as big as the *Planet*—well armed too, I expect.’

He looked again,—

‘There is something like an ensign fluttering up to the peak. She is a Spaniard, and intends to show fight, I am sure. Well, Murray, you will have another yarn to spin to your mother when you get home, and we shall all enjoy ourselves the more at our firesides in old England, when telling of these poor black slaves who have been——’

Dreams—dreams! Never more will happy faces at the fireside brighten up at thy tales, my poor captain. The sentence was never finished. A sudden flame leaped from the stern of the slaver, a shot hissed through the air, struck the commander, tearing a horrid passage through his side, and buried itself with a thud in the foremast.

Gilbert was on the quarter-deck, and jumped on the forecastle as the captain fell. Together we raised him and looked anxiously into his face, but even as we looked, the wild, startled expression left the eyes, they became fixed, the jaw dropped.

'He is gone,' said the assistant-surgeon ; 'another victim to this thrice-accursed slave traffic.'

Moore, the quarter-master, now came forward with a flag, and all that remained of our captain was reverently covered, and carried below to the cabin he had left in joyous spirits so few minutes ago.

Our men looked on with saddened faces, and then turned towards their guns with a sort of angry determination which augured ill for the slave brig which had worked such woe. A second well-aimed shot from the stern-chaser now passed through our foresail, hurting no one ; and then another followed so closely, that it was evident two guns had now been trained aft to bear on us.

'Never mind,' said the first lieutenant, who had assumed the command ; 'our time is coming now.

Man the port guns and fire as they bear. Quarter-master, keep her away.'

The *Planet's* bows gradually fell off before the wind, bringing her broadside to bear, and five 18-pounders poured their shot into the enemy's stern. They must at that short distance have told awfully. One shot only was returned, an unlucky one, carrying away our foretopsail halliards—down came the sail upon the cap. The slaver increased her distance.

'Quick, men, with your guns, before she gets out of range, or we shall lose her after all. Away, aloft, foretopmen and riggers, get that sail ready for setting.'

Not another shot did the slaver fire in answer to our second broadside, but glided away until she seemed but a white spot in the darkness of night. At length—it seemed an age first—the foretopsail was again hoisted, we followed in her wake, overhauling the chase so rapidly that in a few minutes we gained more than we had lost. Some-

thing queer in this, I thought, looking at the low line of coast which we were now quickly nearing. Can she have run ashore? The first lieutenant seemed struck with the same idea, for he called to the man in the chains,—

‘What water have you?’

The seaman had just then taken a cast of the lead, and sung out almost before the words were out of the officer’s mouth, ‘*By the deep, four.*’ Then in another moment, ‘*And a half three.*’

‘Shorten sail and bring ship to an anchor,’ shouted the first lieutenant. ‘Up courses, lower away the topsails. Stand by the anchor. What have you now, quarter-master?’

‘*Quarter less three,*’ came back in short, quick tones, very different from the slow, musical chant with which, in deep water, the leadsman sings, ‘*By the deep, nine.*’

‘Let go the anchor.’

The anchor dropped, the chain-cable rattling after

it a moment and then stopping short, showing well what shallow water we had got into.

'A narrow squeak that,' remarked Forrester, joining me on the forecastle, as soon as the momentary confusion had subsided. 'The poor old *Planet* was very near laying her bones on the coast instead of quietly going to decay in Portsmouth Harbour. Why, she draws almost fifteen feet aft, and I expect her keel is stirring up the mud now.'

The boatswain's mate's pipe cut short our talk.
'Away there, cutters and first gigs, man and arm your boats !'

'Hurrah !' cried Forrester; 'work for you and me again, Murray; come along !' He had charge of the cutter and I of the gig, and in ten minutes the boats were alongside with crews in them all ready, waiting only for their officers. The first lieutenant detained us with a few words of caution, and then we sprang into the stern sheets and shoved off.

The two boats pulled quietly towards the slaver, each of the crew with cutlass in belt and musket on the thwarts by his side ; besides which my old companion, Moore, was in the stern-sheets of the gig and a small-arm man forward. The cutter had two marines, with their muskets, in the bows and one seated on each thwart alongside the rowers. When we were well out of ear-shot of the cruiser, Forrester hailed me to close, saying as the men rested on their oars,—

‘It is quite right, of course, for a commanding officer with no end of responsibility to give orders about proper caution and all that sort of thing ; and we will be very cautious—until the brig begins to fire. But as soon as she does, Murray, throw caution overboard and pull away as hard as you can ; we will have a race for it, and see who will board first.’

‘All right, I understand,’ was my reply. ‘Give way, men.’

As we neared the vessel it became plain that she

was hard and fast aground broadside on to the shore, with her masts leaning over in that direction. No sign of life was apparent on board. Closer and closer still we came, the only sound being the smooth water lapping her side, but my heart beat in expectation of the moment when the stillness would be broken by the deadly rattle of musketry from the rigging and the roar of the guns which had already done their work too well. Half-a-dozen more strokes, and we were under the shadow of her hull. Still no movement. Have the crew abandoned her and escaped by the boats? We pull round the in-shore side, make our way on board without opposition, and find not a man on deck or below.

There was no doubt as to the character of the deserted vessel, although no slaves had been yet shipped, for Moore reported on coming up after a search, that a regular slave-deck was built up below, and manacles and irons were in plenty. She carried two broadside guns and a beautiful long brass stern-

chaser, which we at once resolved should be taken on board the *Planet*, even if the slaver herself could not be got off. At the peak still floated the gorgeous Spanish ensign which such ships and such crews disgrace. Forrester began to haul it down with his own hands, and I went below to explore the captain's cabin.

I had no lantern, but the darkness was not intense and the cabin door at the foot of the companion-ladder was open. On entering I noticed at once a strong smell as of something burning. Looking anxiously round the cabin I saw a dim light in the corner of the port side, and the thought flashed across my mind that the miscreants, in deserting the ship, had planned a diabolical scheme for the destruction of their pursuers.

Shall I rush on deck, and with Forrester and the rest escape from the prize, ere the powder explodes and ship and men are hurled in wild confusion athwart the air? No; by a sort of horrible fascination I cannot leave the cabin. I am impelled, as

it were, against my will towards that faint light, glowing red like a serpent's eye. I grope my way to the spot, and bending over, watch the slow match as it gradually burns away, getting each moment as I look nearer and nearer still towards the slight train connecting it with the open bung-hole of the powder cask on which it rests.

I gaze and gaze, horror-struck with the almost certainty that the attempt to take up the match and throw it away can but precipitate the catastrophe. What hand steady enough to remove it without dropping a spark? Now it almost touches the train—not the eighth of an inch interposes between us and destruction. A peal of merry laughter grates upon my ear from the unconscious sailors overhead, who little deem that the next moment will in all probability be their last. I break the spell. Uttering a hurried ejaculation for help, I quickly and carefully grasp the burning fragment with my fingers—lift it up. Thank God! Saved! No, at the very moment a dreadful groan from the other

side of the cabin startles me—the match drops from my hand, falls on the edge of the cask, a grain of powder fires up. I cover my eyes, awaiting the dread explosion.

But it came not. The grain was but a detached bit that had rolled away when the powder train had been laid. I trod out the last spark of the match, hurried from the cabin, and gained the upper deck with a grateful heart, although sorely puzzled to account for the groan which I had heard at so critical a time.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FATE OF THE DOLORIDA.

FORRESTER was startled when I told him quietly of the plan laid for our destruction —from which nothing could have saved us had I not by good Providence gone below in the nick of time. We decided to say nothing to the crew for fear of a causeless panic, but we went down together in the dark to the cabin, carried the powder barrel on deck, and dropped it overboard unobserved. Now we could have lights without danger, and search for the cause of the horrid sound which had made me drop the match. Moore accompanied us with a couple of lanterns, and on looking into a sleeping berth on the starboard side of the cabin we discovered the form of a man huddled up, insensible.

My foot slipped on something wet as I stooped, and, taking the lantern, I saw that a small stream of blood had trickled down from the bed, forming a little pool on the deck. A shot had torn away the man's right arm entirely, and it was clear that the crew of the slaver, unwilling to be encumbered with the useless burden, and perhaps thinking it was impossible for the wounded man to recover, had left him to perish in the explosion.

'Take the gig, Moore,' said Forrester; 'pull as hard as you can to the *Planet*, and ask the first lieutenant to send the assistant-surgeon back with you.'

While waiting for the doctor we more closely examined the wounded man. He was either captain or mate, for the linen of his shirt and the blue cloth of his trousers—all the clothing he had on—were of the finest substance. The fingers of the well-shaped hand were loaded with massive gold rings, the ears also had the ornaments a sailor delights in wearing, and the black hair was twisted into ringlets, the

long ends of which were now dabbled with blood. A ghastly pallor had overspread the dark and clearly cut features, and the forehead was seamed with the scar of an old wound. The face looked in some way strangely familiar, and I remarked,—

‘I don’t know what makes me think so, but I am sure I have seen this fellow before.’

Forrester put the lantern close to the Spaniard’s face, gave another long look, and exclaimed,—

‘Eureka! That poor fellow lying there, Murray, who must so soon answer for his sins, is the man who stood by the mainmast of the slaver *Dolorida* when we boarded her, and with his musket pointed at my head was in the very act of pulling the trigger when you so gallantly brought your cutlass down on his forehead. And that little scar there is your work. Well, I should scarcely have thought your young arm at that time could leave such a good mark.’

We heard the gig coming alongside again, and the assistant-surgeon joining us began his examina-

tion, but very soon remarked, 'My skill can do nothing in this case.'

'Oh, but, Gilbert, you *must* keep him alive long enough to tell the story of the *Dolorida*'s loss, and what became of our poor prize crew.' And then I explained who the patient was.

'Well, we will try to manage that; but really, as to the man himself, it would be more merciful to let him pass away quietly now that he is insensible, than to give him the pain of coming again to life and feeling the agony of his wound. Die he must to-morrow, if not to-night.'

It was decided to remove the Spaniard at once to the *Playet*; and when Gilbert had finished his bandaging he accompanied his patient (still insensible) in the cutter. We soon followed in the gig with the rest of the men. As to the crew of the slaver, any attempt to follow them was useless; doubtless they had safely landed long ago, and in truth we were not sorry to be saved the trouble of disposing of these miscreants.

I was rather done up with the night's work and turned in at once, but no sleep visited my hammock for a long time, and when it did come, dreams came with it wherein I was ever watching imaginary matches smouldering on powder barrels, and struggling vainly against an imaginary hand which held me back from snatching them away.

While at breakfast next morning in the berth, Gilbert was called away by his assistant. Shortly returning, he said, that if I wished to extract any confession from the Spaniard it must be done at once, for though sensible, he was gradually sinking and was only kept up by stimulants. He had already admitted having been in the missing prize, and said he was willing to tell all he knew.

I went with Gilbert to the cabin where the dying man lay, and then from his lips I heard the fate of our prize crew. The story was told, or rather gasped out, in a mixture of Spanish and broken English which I will not attempt to reproduce in its entirety.

‘Yes, I know, *Señor tenente*, you gave me this cut with your sword’—he tried to touch the scar, but his hand was powerless. ‘Ah, never mind ! I have had my revenge since, and should not be in your power now had not those cursed poltroons deserted me in my own ship. You want to know what became of the *Dolorida* after you—pirates and heretics as you are—captured her ? Good ! you shall hear. You English do your work well, but you are not always clever. You talk big words about having no slaves. *Basta !* you get drunk—you are slaves to drink !

‘When the *Dolorida* had been two days, three days, at sea, I heard your officer say, all was going well, in another week we should be in Sierra Leone. But that evening the English sailors found a cask of arrack below ; they bored a hole, they began to drink. But one old man—quarter-master they called him—said, “No more now, the lieutenant will find us out and throw the cask overboard ; wait till night comes.” Then they stop up the hole

and go on deck. I listen and tell my three comrades whom your captain had left on board the brig with me what I think. These men Brazilians, not Spaniards; they tremble, say, "No good fighting against *Inglese*; besides, what can four do against twelve?" I tell them, "Wait, you see."

'Ten o'clock come that night, eleven o'clock, *tenente* still on deck. Good officer that, he never go below. By and by he get blanket, tell quartermaster at wheel to keep good look-out, and lies down on deck close by.

'Now English sailors take peg out of cask, fill large tin cans with arrack, and come on deck forward. One man bring pannikin full to quartermaster; then they get more arrack up from below. Soon they all dead drunk and lying about like swine. I lean over the side, smoking cheroot, pretend see nothing; at last, quartermaster drunk too, and tumble on deck. Then I go forward, call three Brazilians, "Come;" but they cowards, pretend not to hear. "All right. I do it myself." I

take knife out—your captain fool to let Spaniard keep his knife. Officer fast asleep. I walk on tip-toe, kneel down by him, pull blanket quietly away, feel for his heart. Moon very bright and I see a smile on his face. “Stop; perhaps he has wife at home and dreams of her. Ah! I have wife too—how can I kill him?” I turn away. But I think again, he is English heretic, good deed to kill heretic! I stoop down—find good place, and press my knife through his heart. He only draws up his legs, sob once and die.

‘Now I call again to Brazilians, “English officer dead,” and they only afraid a little and come on deck. Then we take up sailors, throw them all overboard—splash—they sink like dead swine, not move nor speak word. Quarter-master not so drunk; he take hold of ship’s side, but Brazilian cut off his fingers, and he sink too.

‘Then I thank my patron, the blessed San Josef, who had given me this fine ship and the negroes in her all to myself; and I alter course for Cuba,

where I would sell them and return home with doubloons plenty to make my wife the richest woman in the village.

'But when I tell the Brazilians, they say, "Cuba too long voyage," and begin to drink arrack like the English sailors. Then I put back to West Coast to get more men. In three days we anchor at Whydah, but the King of Dahomey sends black soldiers on board, takes possession of the slaves for himself. And I—what can I do? The king tells lies; says Queen of England is his friend, keeps me prisoner for nearly two years; then I escape in a slave ship going to Brazil, a good friend makes me Captain of his brig—and now again, you cursed *Inglese*—'

The Spaniard died with the anathema on his tongue. During the latter part of the narrative, which was broken with frequent pauses throughout, the words could be only distinguished by placing my ear close to his mouth; but while describing the scene on board the *Dolorida*, he became excited

and spoke almost entirely in broken English, as if afraid any of his words should be misunderstood.

Saddened by the horrible story of the murder of our lost shipmates, we left the cabin and went on deck, where the sight of the ensign drooping half-mast high at the peak did not tend to make us more cheerful. The body of the Spaniard was sewn up in a hammock with heavy shot, and cast overboard that evening, the first lieutenant declaring he would read no burial service over the assassin, and I believe we were all greatly relieved when it was out of the ship.

We paid several visits to the stranded prize in the course of the day. She was too much injured by shot to be got off even if we possessed the means, so we contented ourselves with saving the guns and any other useful and valuable articles—not forgetting *eatables*. The midshipmen's berth was well supplied for a long time afterwards with potatoes and butter, two chief luxuries at sea.

Next morning we got under-weigh and the first lieutenant sent for the gunner.

'That brig will make capital target practice,' Mr Andrews ; open the magazine and we will have a shot or two at her.

The canvas had been stripped from her yards, but the men fired well, and a few shots brought the masts tumbling about her decks. Then sailing a little further off, we fired at the hull, but our practice was suddenly brought to a close. The third shot had scarce crashed through the side when a bright flame burst upwards, a loud explosion shook the air, and fragments of spars and planks were scattered in all directions through dense clouds of smoke. As they fell the vessel herself seemed to collapse, and in another minute a black mass of wreck, level with the waters and washed by every wave, was all that remained of our prize.

'Thus may all slavers perish!' exclaimed Forrester, who had been watching the catastrophe at my side. 'But I say, Murray, if you had unluckily

knocked in the head of this second and unthought-of powder barrel by mistake, while rummaging after those kegs of butter now sweetly reposing in the berth, this grand tableau would have rather lost its charm. Better be a spectator than an actor after all.'

At sunset that evening, having made a good offing, we committed the body of our kind-hearted captain to the deep. There was not a dry eye in the ship when the coffin was stripped of the Union Jack and lowered gently over the side into the blue water, fit resting-place for the good old sailor.

Captain Dentloup was the last of the victims sacrificed in the *Planet* by shot or fever, to England's efforts to suppress the African slave trade.

In two months more our anchor dropped at Spithead, and the moment sails were furled and yards squared we rushed below to open the letters which had been brought on board by a friendly bumboat. Mine told of nothing but good news

and hearty welcomes to England. Forrester was interrupted in reading his by a summons on deck, whence he soon returned, waving triumphantly an official-looking document with a big seal,—

‘My commission as lieutenant! Well, one must not grudge three years on the West Coast, and even being shot by a rascally slave captain, when one has *this* in return to show the dear ones at home.’

THE END.

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